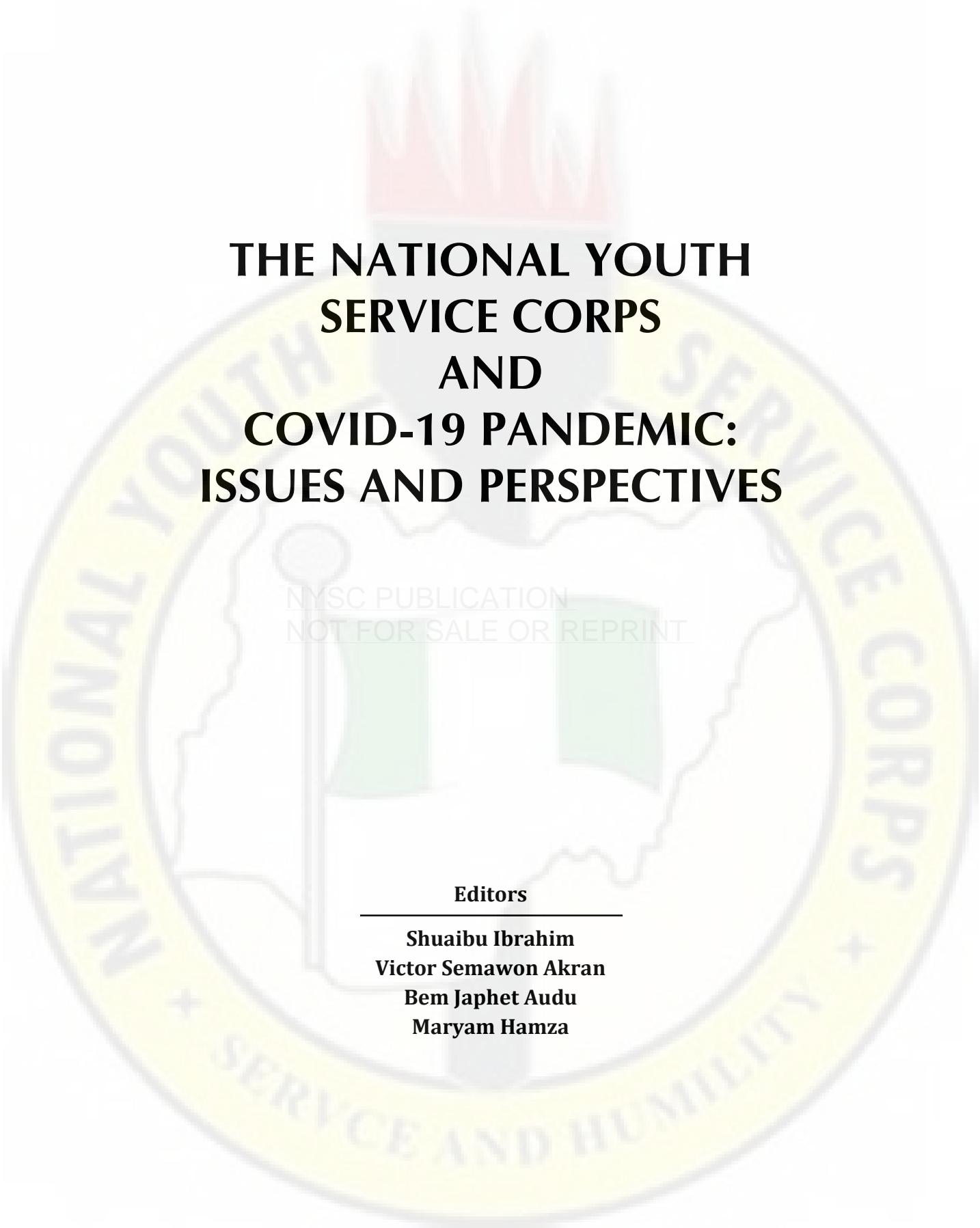


THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS AND **COVID-19 PANDEMIC:** ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

Shuaibu Ibrahim
Victor Semawon Akran
Bem Japhet Audu
Maryam Hamza



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Editors

Shuaibu Ibrahim
Victor Semawon Akran
Bem Japhet Audu
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Bem Japhet Audu, Maryam Hamza

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+234(0)8023633763

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Adeniji Olawale Abayomi, is of the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Asor Gbamwua, is with the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies Kola Daisi University, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Aweng Johnson, is a Postgraduate Student in the Department of Management Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Bem Japhet Audu PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Hussaini Jibrin, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer with the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Itodo, Unekwu Friday, is a lecturer in History and International Studies Department, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Jeremiah Jack, is a Postgraduate Student in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Jibunor Udoka Victor, is of the Department of Chemistry, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

Kasang Y. Basham Bako, is a Doctoral Student of the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Maryam Hamza PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Nyerohwo Avi Eduvvwie, is a Doctoral Student of the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Olutayo Ajibade, is of the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Rufai Aliyu PhD, is a Serving Military Officer (Major) with the Nigeria Army.

Shehu Sule, PhD is a lecturer in FCT College of Education Zuba-Abuja.

Thaddeus T. Ityonzughul PhD, is with the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies Kola Daisi University Ibadan, Nigeria.

Usman Abubakar Lamido, is a Lecturer in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

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PREFACE

The outbreak of Corona virus Disease (COVID-19) in Wuhan city of China in December, 2019 was shocking and surprising to the entire world. It is an acute respiratory disease caused by novel corona virus called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that had not been previously identified in humans. It started spreading through contact and killing people massively in different countries without immediate solution. In several infected people usually develop mild to moderate symptoms such as fever, dry cough, tiredness sore throat, diarrhoea, shortness of breath while some are asymptomatic. Asymptomatic means that no symptoms or signs of disease are present in an individual. The origin of the disease was controversial, some pointed to human contact with wild animals others are of the view that the virus came from a high-security laboratory and therefore fabricated by the Chinese for a motive.

From China it had assumed an epidemic and pandemic which was first reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) that declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. By 14 April 2020, One million, eight hundred and seventy-three thousand, two hundred and sixty-five (1,873,265) cases of COVID-19 have been reported across the globe, including One Hundred and eighteen thousand, eight hundred and fifty-four (118 854) deaths.

The disease spread to other parts of the world and in the spate of 3 months the disease was already in Nigeria through international travels. Nigeria's first index case was recorded on 27th February when an Italian citizen tested positive in Lagos. Apart from the apparent disease magnitudes across sectors and sections, ill-health and mortality, the diverse actions taken by various governments at different levels to control and contain the spread of the virus instigated major disorders that have affected all aspects of social and economic activity across the country. In Nigeria, the president set up the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 as Nigeria's highest public health

emergency response unit charged with this onerous responsibility. The first step taken by the task force was to prevent community transmission of COVID-19 in Nigeria, states like Lagos, Ogun, FCT implemented a lockdown and stay at home directives effective from March 30, 2020, consequently leading to restrictions of inter-state movement throughout the country. Second, its target was to flatten the COVID-19 curve by reducing confirmed cases and ensuring infected persons recover quickly. A total lockdown was later replaced by a relaxed lockdown with curfew from 8 pm to 6 am effective from May 4, 2020, while the inter-state travel ban was still enforced. In these lockdown health workers, security personnel and movement of essential commodities were exempted.

The NYSC was highly affected as some batches in 2020 could not engage in the orientation course properly while those corps members serving were abruptly interrupted. The management of the scheme meticulously galvanized the corps members in turning the surge into innovations, raising their ingenuity and unveiling their potentials. The NYSC has been able to, not only overwhelmed the COVID-19 but shown the skill of the corps members through meaningful efforts to support the National efforts on COVID-19, the national efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic through mass production and donation of face masks, Antiseptic liquid soaps, Hand sanitizers as well as sensitization driven by corps members in many states across the country. There was serious effort geared towards the fabrication of foot-operated/automatic (water, liquid soap, hand sanitizer) dispensers, face masks, etc. by individual corps members in several States all helped curtail and contains the spread of COVID-19 within the country.

These brilliant performances of the scheme at a critical time of national emergencies like the COVID-19 needed documentation for the public and posterity. This necessitated the writing of this book which is structured into fifteen well researched chapters. The book gives a general overview of Covid-19 and the perception of Nigerians and the Nigerian government towards its spread. It appraises the National Youth Service Scheme Corps medical team in its tackling of the

pandemic. It also assess the intervention of corps members in the health sector especially during this period of the deadly Covid-19 outbreak.

This book focuses on assessing the impact of Covid-19 on Corps members mobilisation and its impact on Corps members as it relates to their safety and the management of the disease. The work further evaluates the challenges posed by covid-19 especially as it affects the orientation camping programmes of the Scheme and how the Scheme had overcome these challenges.

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May God Bless us all.

**Shuaibu Ibrahim, Victor Semawon Akran, Bem Japhet Audu,
Maryam Hamza.** *April, 2021.*

INTRODUCTION

Brief History of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was established in 1973 by the government of General Yakubu Gowon. The history of the scheme is traceable to the events that took place in Nigeria towards the last half of 1960s. The years 1967-1970 were characterized by the Nigerian civil war. At the end of the war, the General Gowon administration came up with new policies that would promote post-conflict peace, reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Consequently, the vital need for national unity led to the birth of the NYSC idea. The NYSC Scheme came into being through Decree No. 24 of 22nd May 1973. It states that the NYSC is being established with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity. After 20 years of existence, the 1973 Decree was repealed and replaced with No. 51 of 16th June, 1993, now referred to as the National Youth Service Corps Act, Cap. N84, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004. The Act is preserved by Section 315 (5) (a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), thereby, making the NYSC Act part and parcel of the constitution.

According to Section 1(3) of the NYSC Act, the objectives of the Scheme are to:

- (a) inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves;
- (b) raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of nation achievements, social and cultural improvement;

- (c) develop in Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest;
- (d) enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment;
- (e) contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy;
- (f) develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration;
- (g) remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups; and
- (h) develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.”

In order to achieve the objectives stated above, Section 1(4) of the NYSC Act provides that the Scheme shall ensure:

- “(a) the equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilization of their skills in area of national needs;
- (b) that are far as possible, Nigerian youths are assigned to jobs in States other than their States of origin;
- (c) that such group of Nigerian youths assigned to work together is as representative of Nigeria as far as possible;

- (d) that the Nigerian youths are exposed to the mode of living of the people in different parts of Nigeria.
- (e) the Nigerian youths are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences;
- (f) the members of the service corps are encouraged to seek a year for their one year national service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labour;
- (g) that employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of the States or origin."

Basically, the aims and objectives of the NYSC is to reinforce institutional efficiency and effectiveness as well as youth development in the country. It is accepted in several quarters that NYSC is a viable platform for the transitioning of youths into self-reliant adults and the improvement of general welfare and development. The NYSC programme has since inception facilitated steady and effective supply and distribution of skilled manpower, breaking of social and cultural barriers as well as the building of friendly bridges across ethno-linguistic boundaries. It has also assisted in the promotion of values, national unity and development, rekindled interest in neglected but vital areas of national development and promoted leadership qualities in the youths. The Scheme has four (4) cardinal programmes which are: Mobilisation/Orientation, Primary Assignment, Community Development Service and Winding-Up/Passing- Out Exercise.

The maximum age requirement for youths under the scheme is thirty (30) years old. They are also engaged in community development programmes and activities. According to Section 2(2) of the NYSC Act, the only groups of youth exempted are those that have served in the

Armed forces or the Nigerian Police for a period of more than nine (9) months or in the security agencies, those over thirty (30) years of age and those conferred with National Honours. In addition, the choice of youths above every other age group was based on the fact that they are considered the most active change agents needed in building a united Nigeria, and a way of achieving this is for the youths to imbibe and nurture a sense of common belonging and national consciousness which would transcend political, social, state and ethnic loyalties.

At the onset of the NYSC in 1973, only 2,346 graduates were mobilized. However, judging by the evolution of the Scheme, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of graduates that are participating annually. NYSC is capable of bringing out the best qualities in Nigerian youth and imparting in them the right attitude and value for nation building that serves as catalyst to national development, sense of pride and fulfillment of its participating graduate youths. The criteria observed in the deployment of Corps members include:

- the equality of states,
- ability of states to absorb the service of participants,
- posting based on concessional considerations (marital and health grounds), posting on demand from various federal government establishments,
- the supportive role of a government is also increasingly becoming a factor in the placement of corps members,
- the deployment of corps members has retained its traditional process with the majority of corps members going to the classrooms.

The Scheme's presence is felt and noticed in all the LGAs in the country, creating higher emphasis in the rural and grass root development in line with its objectives since inception.

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1

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Adeniji Olawale Abayomi

Introduction

The impact COVID-19 had on the global timeline is somewhat incomparable with earlier incidents of such. Albeit, the revolution in technology has been of immense significance in efforts aimed towards curbing the spread of the dreaded virus, it can be agreed that the virus still poses a resilient challenge to the global established order of events. Indeed, the global community recognised the threat the virus poses and in efforts to fight against it, numerous countries in the world had harnessed both intellectual and financial coupled with human resources in order to combat the common enemy, corona virus.

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However, in recent times, there appears to be somewhat of a reduced figure in the number of cases, appending to that, the discovery of the corona virus vaccine has given the world a hope towards its efforts at realising a world free of Covid-19 infection, or at least, less cases of death and infections.

According to studies by researchers like that of Lauer,¹ traced the origin of the virus to the Wuhan, the capital of the Hubei province of China in December 2019. In its early stages, there were some cases which were reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The WHO, after extensive analysis and examination determined it was a new string of virus, or in other words, it was a new classification of virus under the SARS-CoV virus first discovered in 2002. For easy comprehension, a name was ascribed to the virus by the WHO on 11th of February, 2020. It is an acronym which stands for Corona virus Disease of 2019. When contacted, the individual shows early signs of symptoms which include fever, cough, shortness of breath, loss of smell. Furthermore, the complications are of a greater degree than the symptoms as it could lead to pneumonia, viral sepsis, acute respiratory distress syndrome, kidney failure, etc. The complications over time have been said to worsen based on the health status of the individual.² The virus is a very tricky one and requires a measure of precautions in order to stay free off the virus. The virus is not air borne but however, can be spread through various means. The most apparent and principal way of spreading the virus amongst people is through close contact with individuals who are already in possession of the virus. More so, if droplets from infected persons fall on surfaces, people could get infected by touching an already contaminated surface. Various studies

¹ Lauer, S. G. The Incubation Period of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) From Publicly Reported Confirmed Cases: Estimation and Application. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, (2020): 577-582.

² Sohrabi, C. A.-J, "World Health Organisation declares global emergency: A review of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19)", *International Journal of Surgery*. (2020).

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have shown that the half-life of the virus outside the human body is temperature and humidity dependent, hence, different regions can have different rates of spread.³

The most precautions method to take up against the virus is keeping a safe distance from individuals who are infected, and if possible, everyone you come in contact with as the virus could take days before showing symptoms and so it is hard to ascertain who is infected or not. More so, the symptoms are irregular, so it is difficult to clearly identify an infected person without testing. And that was the reason numerous countries all over the world decided to lockdown their countries and restrict general intra-country movements. The difficult to ascertain infectious individuals is one of the reasons why the virus has wildly spread globally appending to the interdependency nature of the global community makes it even worse. According to a study embarked by Lauer,⁴ there are three categories of people infected or silent carriers of this virus. They are'

1. Asymptomatic: people who carry the active virus in their body but never develop any symptoms.
2. Presymptomatic: people who have been infected and are incubating the virus but don't yet show symptoms.
3. Very mildly symptomatic: people who feel a little unwell from a Covid-19 infection but continue to come in close contact with others.

Considering the above, it could be subscribed that, indeed, social distancing is to some extent the best, effective and most feasible precaution method against the virus.

³Luo, P. L. (2020). Tocilizumab treatment in COVID-19: a single center experience. Journal of medical virology.

⁴Lauer, S. G. The Incubation Period of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) From Publicly Reported Confirmed Cases: Estimation and Application. Annals of Internal Medicine,(2020): 577-582.

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The impact of this virus is relative worldwide, however, what is not relative are the measures taken up by different countries in order to curb the spread and challenges that comes as an antecedent of the virus. This work is much concern with the virus in the context Nigerian. The following sub-themes would do well to examine on this issue.

The Evolution of COVID-19 In Nigeria

The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Infectious Disease Centre, Yaba, Lagos State, Nigeria on the 27th February, 2020. It is argued that the first index case in Nigeria was an Italian citizen who arrived at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos at 10:00 p.m. on 24th February, 2020 on-board a Turkish airline from Milan, Italy. He visited his company's site in Ogun State the following day where he presented himself at his company's staff clinic. The physician-on-duty had a strong suspicion of the presence of the virus. This led him to refer the Italian citizen to Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) and the COVID-19 status was confirmed.⁵

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control⁶ started the contact tracing of 'Persons of Interest' which included all persons on the manifesto of the flight that brought the index case to Nigeria, as well as people who had close contact with the index case while in Lagos and Ogun State. After a period of two weeks, a cluster of cases was detected in Lagos and Abuja, this was noted to be the emergence of the nationwide spread of the virus. The Federal Government, through the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), restricted International commercial flights into the

⁵ Nigeria Centre for Disease and Control. (2020, March 28). COVID-19 Outbreak in Nigeria Situation Report. Accessed 28th February 2021.
<https://ncdc.gov.ng/diseases/sitreps/?cat=14&name=An%20update%20of%20COVID-19%20outbreak%20in%20Nigeria>

⁶ Nigeria Centre for Disease and Control. (2020, March 26). COVID-19 Outbreak in Nigeria Situation Report. Accessed 29th February 2021
<https://ncdc.gov.ng/diseases/sitreps/?cat=14&name=An%20update%20of%20COVID-19%20outbreak%20in%20Nigeria>

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country, effective from 23rd March, 2020. On the same day, Nigeria registered her first fatality; a 67-year-old male returnee from the United Kingdom who already had underlying medical issues that were been managed before his death. The death occurred in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.⁷

The Federal Government responded with the authorization of the closure of all non-essential services (businesses and industries) and restricted movement of people in Lagos State, Ogun State and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, on 29th March, 2020. Most State Governments restricted public gathering and there were restrictions on Inter-state movement. The Federal Government later authorized the gradual easing of lockdown in the previously restricted states on the 4th May, 2020.

The Spread and Containment of COVID-19 in Nigeria

The nationwide spread of the virus led to the Federal government of Nigeria effecting certain measures to contain the virus. The available information on the virus and the welfare of her citizenry were guiding beacons in periodic restrictions to maximize containment. Educational and Religious institutions were the first bodies restricted before containment measures extended to non-essential services.⁸

The Federal Government with the aid of different ministries and governmental agencies put up a formidable response in the fight against COVID-19 in Nigeria. Leading the frontlines is the Federal

⁷Onyeji, E. Premium Times. Retrieved from Nigeria bans all international flights ascoronavirus cases rise:(2020, March 21).

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/383095-updated-nigeria-bans-all- international-flights-as-coronavirus-cases-rise-coronavirus-coronavirusinnigeria- coronavirusupdate-coronaviruspandemic.html>

⁸Onyeji, E. (2020, March 27). Nigeria: Coronavirus—Report returnees not observing self-isolation—Minister urges Nigerians. allAfrica. Retrieved from <https://allafrica.com/stories/202003270756>

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Ministry of Health; the ministry is tasked the formulation and implementation of policies related to COVID-19 in Nigeria with collaboration with relevant ministries and agencies. The Federal Ministry of Health through its Accreditation Committee are involved with inspection of public and private treatment centres for COVID-19 confirmed cases. Furthermore, the ministry handles the training guidelines and personal protective equipment [PPE] distribution for frontline workers for this novel disease. The ministry is strongly supported by the Presidential Task Force for the Control of the COVID-19 (PTF) and the Nigeria Centre for Disease and Control (NCDC). President Buhari set up a 12-member task force to champion the battle against COVID-19 in the country. The Task Force is chaired by the Secretary to the Federal Government, Mr. Boss Mustapha and Dr. Sani Aliyu is the National Coordinator of the Group.⁹ The task force's mandate is to create a workable National Response Plan that would be revised on a daily basis as requirements change. The strategy must follow international best practices while taking into account the local circumstances prevailing in the country. The Task Force has been given six months to fulfil its mandate.¹⁰

Moreover, the Nigeria Centre for Disease and Control has been given the mandate to lead preparedness, diagnosis and response to outbreaks of COVID-19 in Nigeria. The parastatal publishes regular updates on reported cases, discharged cases and deaths related to COVID-19 via its website and social media channels. The mission of the NCDC is to protect Nigerians' health through evidence-based prevention, integrated disease surveillance and response programs,

⁹Ameh, J. (2020, March 9). COVID-19: Buhari names 12-member presidential task force to control spread. Retrieved from punchng.com:

<https://punchng.com/covid-19-buhari-names-12-member-presidential-task-force-to-control-spread/>

¹⁰Ailemen, A. Full text of President Buhari's broadcast. Business Nigeria 2020, March 29. <https://businessday.ng/lead-story/article/full-text-of-president-buharis-broadcast/>

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using a single health strategy, driven by research and led by a professional workforce.

The initial performances of the various institutions and agencies of the Government showed the ill-preparedness to combat the virus but the subsequent responses have been phenomenal. This is evident in the containment of the ongoing pandemic spread in Nigeria that began February, 2020. Although, the spread potential is yet to be properly estimated, containment strategy has proven quite effective. A major contributor to the spread worldwide was increased travel, modern transport networks made it easy for travellers to transmit the virus, hence, the ban on inter-state travel was an appropriate containment measure.¹¹

Due to the nature of the symptoms, only people who have been tested can be easily identified as infected. The test results have shown a rising number of people confirmed to have COVID-19. Though a significant number of people recover from the infection, the greater concern lies with those who are yet to be tested. The ease of transmission coupled the rate of interaction amongst the populace indicates that the confirmed cases are merely a small share of the actual numbers. This is demonstrated by the rate of newly confirmed cases by the day. According to the daily reports provided by NCDC, Lagos State with the highest population density in Nigeria has been recording the largest number of confirmed cases. Following the confirmation of the index case of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the viral population rapidly increased within the country at an exponential rate. At the end of the fourth week of the virus in Nigeria, there were a total of 25 recorded cases in the country. Further examination of the confirmed cases revealed that 76 percent of COVID-19 cases had travel history outside the country, while 20 percent of confirmed cases had close contact with COVID-19

¹¹AbdulAzeez, A. A More Preparedness on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Nigeria, 2020.

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patients. The remaining 4 percent of confirmed cases were classified as no epidemiological connection and incomplete information. This implied that the majority of confirmed cases in Nigeria were returnees from epicentres, this prompted NCDC to issue a guideline that made it mandatory for returnees from high-risk countries to stay in isolation for a minimum of 14 days. The Federal government suspended all international flights into Lagos and Abuja, effective 23rd March 2020.¹² The decision was taken as a preventive measure against the spread of the virus in the nation. As of 21st March 2020, only three States of the federation plus the FCT Abuja had recorded cases of COVID-19 in the country; Lagos (19), Ogun (2), Ekiti (1) and Abuja (3).

By the end of the fifth week, there was at least one confirmed case of COVID-19 in all geographical zones of the country. This led to the restriction of interstate movement and total restriction of movement (lockdown) in Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja. In response to this development, the NCDC needed to increase the testing of suspected cases. Hence, the agency added a modular laboratory at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, Oyo State, to its existing laboratory collection across the country while reporting that additional six would be included in the coming weeks¹³

The efficacy of the lockdown in Abuja, Lagos, and Ogun State was quite doubtful, as citizens were seen to have been reluctant to comply with the restriction in all three States. The ban on inter-state movement has been allegedly defeated by the corruption embodied by our society. The promise of palliatives (cash transfer and relief materials distribution)

¹²Onyeji, E. Premium Times. Retrieved from Nigeria bans all international flights as coronavirus cases rise:2020, March 21.

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/383095-updated-nigeria-bans-all- international-flights-as-coronavirus-cases-rise-coronavirus-coronavirusinnigeria- coronavirusupdate-coronaviruspandemic.html>

¹³AbdulAzeez, A. A More Preparedness on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Nigeria, 2020

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has been viewed by members of society as a major failure, considering that Nigeria is the centre of the world's multidimensional poverty. This led to an increase in the crime rate in certain parts of Lagos and Ogun States. The concept of social distancing was not strongly adhered to in other states of the Federation, some states did not prohibit religious gathering.¹⁴

There were a total of 541 recorded cases in the country as at the end of the eighth week of the virus in the country, this represented a significant increase of about 2064 percent from the number of confirmed cases as of 21st March 2020. An investigation into the confirmed cases revealed that 34 percent of COVID-19 cases had travel history outside the country, while 37 percent of confirmed cases had close contact with COVID-19 patients. The remaining 29 percent of confirmed cases were classified as no epidemiological connection and incomplete information. This indicated that Nigeria was gradual moving into "community transmission". This could be seen from the decline in the percent of confirmed cases that had travelled outside the country recently and the increase in the percentage of confirmed cases classified no epidemiological connection and incomplete information.

The South Western region of the country accounted for the majority of the confirmed COVID-19 which was largely contributed by Lagos (which has the highest population density). The increase in confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the North West region called for concern given that the virus was properly contained in the geopolitical zone until the index case was registered in the state of Kano. Kano's index case was alleged to have attended numerous parties and religious prayer grounds despite his manifestation of COVID-19 symptoms. This played a major role in the rate of spread across the state and the geopolitical

¹⁴Orjinmo, N., & Ulohotse, A. Lagos unrest: The mystery of Nigeria's fake gangster attacks. BBC, 2020, April 15. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52285271>

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zone as a whole. Kano State became a state of interest due to the number of deaths recorded, the State government released a report indicating that the deaths were not related to COVID-19. However, there were allegations that autopsies were not carried out. The Kano State Government in its attempt to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the State resorted to the evacuation of Almajiris (children migrated in search of Islamic knowledge) from the eight local government areas that make up the metropolis back to their states of origin.¹⁵

By the end of the twelfth week, a total of 5,621 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Nigeria. This represented a significant increase of about 939 percent from the number of confirmed cases as of 18th April 2020. Further inspection in the confirmed cases revealed that 4 percent of COVID-19 cases had travel history outside the country, while 25 percent of confirmed cases had close contact with COVID-19 patients. The remaining 71 percent of confirmed cases were classified as no epidemiological connection and incomplete information. This showed that Nigeria was fully “community transmission” phase, as majority of the confirmed cases cannot be linked to recent travels outside the country. Therefore, Nigeria responded by increasing testing facilities across the nation.

Furthermore, in pursuit of relief, the Federal Government requested a product that allegedly cures COVID-19 from Madagascar. The product has been accredited with the high recovery rate in Madagascar. Directives have been given to the National Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD) and the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), by the President of

¹⁵Ezeamalu, B. Coronavirus: How Kano's index case deceived us – Medical Doctor. Premium Times, 2020, April 16
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/388214-coronavirus-how-kanos-index-case-deceived-us-medical-doctor.html>

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the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to ensure a thorough analysis and scrutiny before it is admitted into the country.¹⁶

However, a 15-member team of Chinese medical personnel arrived in the country on April 8 “to share their experience with fighting COVID-19”. Upon arrival, the team were discovered to be present only to care for the China Civil Engineering construction corporation (CCECC). Their arrival sparked debate among various medical professionals about the need for foreign personnel, these became immaterial with regards to their activities since arrival. The medical personnel are presumed to have to return to China along with 286 Chinese nationals on May 30. (Chinedu, 2020)

NCDC summary as of 30th May 2020, showed that about 62,583 samples had been collected while 9,855 cases had been recorded. The country had recorded 273 COVID-19 related deaths (a rate of 1.3 deaths per million populations), while there have been 2,856 recoveries. Furthermore, NCDC revealed that 4 percent of COVID-19 cases had travel history outside the country, while 25 percent of confirmed cases had close contact with COVID-19 patients. The remaining 71 percent of confirmed cases were classified as no epidemiological connection and incomplete information, this implies majority of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country falls under community transmission. Due to the limited number of tests performed it is difficult to ascertain the real number of infected people in Nigeria. As in other countries, it is estimated to be higher than the official count.

Outlook of the Future of COVID-19 in Nigeria

The Covid-19 is a global pandemic whose wide spread has resulted in a downturn in global economic activities. Various countries of the world have been affected in different ways and different control mechanisms have been deployed to manage the situation. The nature of the virus

¹⁶ Daily Trust. Nigeria: On the Madagascar COVID-19 Cure. All Africa, 2020, May 31. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202005180296.html>

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makes it difficult to detect, hence, it is difficult to estimate the actual number of people infected.

Nigeria is perceived as an urbanized population with about 49.66% of the population resident in the rural areas. The average household size for the rural and urban household is 5.9 and 4.9 persons respectively. Social distancing has proven feasible in urban settlements but rural settlements live communally and would experience difficulty in isolation because there is not enough room for isolation. The rural households are labour endowed and generate a large share of their income through the supply of labour services. The economic downturn creates further inconveniences associated with increased consumption and lower income available. The population distribution also indicates that the aging population (the perceived most vulnerable to the disease) dominantly reside in the rural areas, hence, a breakout in the rural areas would be catastrophic because it would increase the death rate by a significant margin.¹⁷

The apparent best measures have been deployed by every country to meet their contextual conditions till an appropriate vaccine is provided. Though the accelerated expected time frame for its effective distribution is between 12-18months, there have been heavy investments to ensure the time frame is reduced by half.

Policy Implication

The Government's need to increase investment in data collection and storage has been revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has exposed the insufficient data on the socio-economic distribution of the Nigerian

¹⁷World Health Organization. Statement on second meeting of the International Health Regulation (2005) Emergency Committee regarding the outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). 2020, January 30. [https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))

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population. This has made the provision of palliatives and relief resources to vulnerable individuals/households ineffective. Periodic data collection projects must be implemented by the government with the cooperation of the related agencies and the private sector. Improving data collection and storage would have a significant role to play in socio-economic development. Aggregation of data is often proposed because the data collected is processed with various government entities, centralization of data would help to reduce data fragmentation and would make data easily accessible when needed.

African countries in 2001 reached an agreement to allocate at least 15 percent of budget allocation to the health sector, this agreement is known as 2001 “Abuja Declaration”. Research into budget allocation in previous years showed that Nigeria never managed to reach 8 percent health budget spending since the return to democracy governance in 1999. In recent years, the allocation to the sector has been 4.23 percent of the total budget in 2016 while it was 4.16 and 3.9 percent respectively in 2017 and 2018 respectively. Allocation to the health sector increased to 4.1 percent the total budget while 4.14 percent of the proposed 2020 budget is to be allocated to health. Recurrent expenditure takes more than 80 percent of the allocation to the health sector leaving little for investment in capital health project that would improve the sector.

Nigeria would need to substantially increase its health sector investment, in particular on capital items such as vaccine provision, renovation of hospitals and primary health centres, procurement of medical equipment, disease prevention measures, etc. The allocation of State governments to the health sector needs to be monitored and make provision for the different States to be responsible for primary health. The health sector need for better incentives was also revealed by this pandemic, it showed the welfare package of health workers must also be improved. In particular, the hazard allowance provided to them would help to minimize the brain drain that occurs in the sector,

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given that a large proportion of health workers are migrants to countries with better remuneration. Moreover, Nigeria needs to give priority to the implementation of its National Health Act (NHA) adopted in 2015, which provides for a 1% Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) – money set aside to provide basic health packages for all Nigerians.

Conclusion

Based on the study's examination of the evolution and spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria, its findings urge the Nigerian government to engage in more preventative measures to contain the disease while increasing laboratory testing ability across the country. This would aid in the quick and early discoveries of positive cases to effectively contain the virus during the search for an appropriate vaccine. Historical trends have shown that pandemics are usually more devastating from the second wave. Though that seems improbable with this type of virus, there is still a need to be adequately prepared for the unlikely shock after discovery of the vaccine to ensure current efforts made are not in vain. Finally, the fact that delivery of the vaccine has been realized, it however it puts a major burden on the Nigerian populace to minimize the spread by acting responsibly.

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Introduction

Corona virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an acute respiratory disease caused by novel corona virus called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that had not been previously identified in humans.¹ It affects different people in different ways. In Nigeria, most infected people usually develop mild to moderate symptoms such as fever, dry

¹S. Yakubu, "COVID-19 and Infection Prevention and Control", A Professional Research Paper, May 2020. 2.

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cough, tiredness (common symptoms), sore throat, diarrhoea, shortness of breath (less common symptoms) while some are asymptomatic.² Asymptomatic means that no symptoms or signs of disease are present in an individual.³ It also signifies a state of not causing or presenting signs or symptoms of infection or illness. Some ways of preventing COVID-19 include: washing hands with soap and water regularly, sanitizing with alcohol base hand sanitizer, use of nose mask, physical and social distancing, avoid touching of eyes, nose and mouth and self-isolating if there are symptoms.⁴

The disease was suspected to have taken off from Hubei province, Wuhan city of China and by December 2019, it had assumed an epidemic. From there, it spread to other parts of the world. That it emerged from Wuhan is not in doubt, what however remains debatable is the source. While some believe it was contacted through the consumption of certain wild animals including bats, some others are of the opinion that the virus came from a high-security laboratory and therefore fabricated.

Despite the efforts of the World Health Organisation (WHO) expert mission to China which ended its work in the first few days of February 2021, the mystery surrounding its origin has not been unravelled. China on its part, opted to point accusing fingers to the United States and Europe as possible sources and therefore advises the World Health Organisation team to take the next stage of the virus origin investigation to another country.⁵ Although the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 30th January 2020, Africa recorded its first case in Egypt on February 15th while Nigeria's

²Ramatu Idris, 39 years, Pharmacist, General Hospital Kubwa, Abuja, interviewed in Abuja on February 15 2021.

³www.webmd.com

⁴www.webmd.com...

⁵"Five things we still don't know about origins of COVID-19", Premium Times, February 11, 2021.

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first index case was recorded on 27th February when an Italian citizen tested positive in Lagos.⁶

A gaze into history reveals ten pandemics that ravaged mankind in the past, leaving behind massive death toll. In times past, ailments such as bubonic plague, cholera, smallpox and HIV/AIDS have left their marks of death toll in human history. Pandemics in recorded history began in 165 AD with the Antonine Plague, also known as the Plague of Galen resulting into the death of many people across Asia Minor, Egypt, Greece and Italy. The disease was believed to have been brought to Rome by soldiers returning from Mesopotamia around 165 AD. The disease killed many people and decimated the Roman Army. The Plague of Justinian, known to some as Bubonic Plague, 541-542 was reported to have afflicted the Byzantine Empire and the Mediterranean port cities. The Black Death, 1346-1353 was the name given to a disease that was transmitted by rats through merchant ships from Asia to Europe and Africa. Millions of people were estimated to have died of this deadly ailment.

The Third Cholera Pandemic of 1852-1860, with an estimated death toll of a million, originated in India and spread to Asia, Europe, North America and Africa.⁷ The Flu Pandemic of 1889-1890 was prevalent in Central Asia, Canada and Greenland. Rapid population growth in mostly urban centres helped in no small measure to spread the flu. The sixth Cholera Pandemic lasted from 1910-1911. This epidemic originated in India and resulted in the death of thousands of people. It later spread to the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Russia. To avert high death toll, the United States authorities resorted to isolation of the infected, thereby recording as low as eleven deaths. The Flu Pandemic

⁶S. Yakubu, "COVID-19 and Infection Prevention and Control..."

⁷O. Alagbe and A. Owoseye, "Flashback: 10 Pandemics that Ravaged Mankind", *PremiumTimes*, Tuesday, March 31, 2020.

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of 1918 has been described as the most destructive pandemic in recorded history. Over 20 million were believed to have lost their lives worldwide. A new dimension to the 1918 pandemic was its target of the healthy young adults, unlike past ones that mostly affected juveniles, the elderly and already weakened patients.

The Asian Flu of 1956-1958 originated from the Chinese province of Guizhou and later spread to Singapore, Hong Kong and the United States. The World Health Organization finally put the death toll at approximately 2 million, with the United States alone having 69,800. The Hong Kong Flu of 1968 had its first case reported on 13th July. Within seven days, another outbreak was reported in Singapore and Vietnam. Within the next three months, the disease had spread to the Philippines, India, Australia, Europe and the United States. Of the approximately one million people that died, half of them were recorded in Hong Kong. HIV/AIDS is a very popular disease in contemporary human life. It was first identified in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1976 but its peak was recorded between 2005-2012.

It is a global that pandemic that killed over thirty-six million people since 1981. With an increase in awareness and new treatments developed, the disease has become manageable and those infected have been living a productive life.⁸

COVID-19 in Nigeria: Myth or Reality?

Nigerians hold varied views about Covid-19. Before the national lockdown of 30th March 2020 announced by President Muhammadu Buhari, majority of Nigerians believed in the existence of the corona virus disease, and so, precautions were taken, both overtly and covertly to avert the impending calamity. With the idea of no cure in place, traditional and religious leaders of different communities rolled out prayers and propitiations to save their people. Many others also strove

⁸O. Alagbe and A. Owoseye, "Flashback: 10 Pandemics..."

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to abide by the orthodox preventive measures of nose mask, washing of hands, use of sanitizers and the maintenance of physical distancing. Markets were closed, schools were shut, civil servants were sent home and private businesses and banks had their services almost paralysed. This trend continued from weeks to months while the palliatives promised by the president and affirmed by the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs did not reach the people. While covid-19 cases were recorded against some states and the Federal Capital Territory by the Presidential Task Force (PTF) and the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), states such as Kogi and Cross Rivers openly denied the presence of the disease in their states. The government of Kogi state was more emphatic and did not mince words in concluding that the PTF and the NCDC were deceiving Nigerians. The drama in many isolation centres across the nation gradually began to demystify the corona virus saga. In Gombe, those in the isolation centre once staged protests over neglect and lack of food for almost a month.

The puzzle here is that the people had been in the isolation centre for more than fourteen days; they were counted as carriers of the disease, no treatment, they did not die, neither did any one's condition deteriorate. They were healthy people who jumped on the streets to protest. In some other isolation centres in the country, people were seen eating and dancing to good music instead of being on life support machines and oxygen ventilators as obtained in especially Europe and America. In Kano for instance, the isolation centre at the Abacha stadium was deserted on the eve of (Sallah), with the intent of going for the festival and to return after. If truly those in isolation centres were infected, the tendency to spread the disease when they went for (Sallah) was rife.

The effect of the lockdown imposed by government and its compliance were mostly felt in urban centres of some states and the Federal Capital Territory. Within the FCT, outskirt settlements such as Tunga Maje, Gwako and Paikon Kore carried on life normally without adherence to

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COVID-19 protocols. At the same time, COVID-19 complications were not recorded in such places. Kogi state for instance that shares border with the Federal Capital Territory did not in any way observe COVID-19 protocols and there were no records of related ailments there. The major conviction of the existence of COVID-19 among Nigerians was the condition of top political leaders, businessmen and celebrities who tested positive, got admitted, some were treated and discharged while some died. Prominent among those who contacted the virus are Nasir el-Rufai, late Abba Kyari, Muhammed Atiku Abubakar, Seyi Makinde, Rotimi Akeredolu, Dr Doyin Okupe and Chief Raymond Dokpesi among others.

Throughout the period of the lockdown, security agents at state borders connived with travellers to break the law. At road blocks, each passing vehicle paid specified amount of money so as to be allowed access before daybreak. That a genuine lockdown was not achieved put to question the belief that the dreaded COVID-19 could be transmitted through bodily contact, crowded environment and contact with infected person's belongings.⁹ Another major source of concern was that those diagnosed of the virus claimed to be treated with simple malaria drugs. Raymond Dokpesi on his part came out on air to demand the difference between COVID-19 and malaria, for according to him all the symptoms he experienced and drugs administered were for malaria. This and many other experiences led many people to claim that the government and health practitioners were not sincere in their approach to the COVID-19 issue.

If malaria drugs could treat COVID-19, why the insistence on no cure for the disease. The difference between treatment and cure was however given by Dr Suleiman Omeiza when he noted that cure usually refers to a complete restoration of health, while treatment refers to a

⁹Adozi Salami, Commercial bus driver, Akure-Okene-Abuja route, September 4, 2020.

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process that leads to an improvement in health, but may not include the complete elimination of the disease. Some diseases such as malaria and pneumonia can be cured while other diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and asthma are not curable but can be treated by eliminating their symptoms and improve quality of life.¹⁰ It means therefore that treatment is a process of disease management whereby symptoms are removed while cure entails a complete elimination of the disease from the human body.

COVID-19 Safety Compliance

Nigerians adopted various approaches to COVID-19 safety compliance. After the ease of lockdown, certain guidelines were put in place to prevent the transmission of the deadly virus. They include, as mentioned earlier, use of nose masks or face shield, physical distancing, use of hand sanitizers and washing of hands with soap and water. For the purpose of this study, we shall examine their compliance in different public places and institutions.

Banks

Banks ensured strict compliance with the COVID-19 protocols. Banks placed a ban on crowded banking halls and ATM galleries. Tents were erected within bank premises for customers to wait before being allowed into the bank in turns. There was compulsory use of nose masks and hand sanitizers, while at the same time, soap and running water were available. Physical distancing measures were strictly adhered to both at ATM galleries and banking halls. This situation created serious hardship to bank customers who had to wait all day before being attended to. The consolation however was that with such rules in place, the fear of contracting the disease from banks was slim.¹¹

¹⁰Dr Suleiman Omeiza, 49 years, Consultant Family Health, National Orthopaedic Hospital Dala, Kano, interviewed in Kano, on February 2, 2021.

¹¹Tijani Ibrahim, 35, banker, Abuja, January 27, 2021

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Public Transport

In the states that adhered to COVID-19 safety rules, commercial vehicle operators were under obligation to convey just few passengers at a time. Buses that hitherto conveyed eighteen passengers were mandated to convey just ten, while cars that accommodated six passengers were made to convey three, with the driver making them four.¹² The Federal Capital Territory Administration deployed all uniformed agencies to strategic points on the roads to enforce compliance and bring offenders to book. Tricycle operators were forced to convey two passengers instead of four along their various routes.

Those operating in Gwarimpa and its environ were forced to adhere to the new rules at the initial stage, although the situation reverted to its former state not long after.¹³ The situation was however different with vehicles plying routes within Kogi state and those plying the Abuja-Lokoja-Okene axis. In Kogi state, the public transport sector did not observe and safety rule, the situation was as obtainable before the outbreak of the disease. As at May/June 2020 when the total national lockdown has been eased to inter-state ban, vehicles from Kogi state still found their way to the FCT. Initially, they created routes in the bushes of Abaji through which they avoided the heavily manned roadblock. As time went on however, the drivers struck a deal with the security agents to an extent that any movement before 6 am attracted a toll fee of 500 naira. From there, they could move within the FCT unhindered.¹⁴

Markets

Markets were shut down in areas such as the FCT, Lagos, Kaduna, Kano and some other COVID-19 protocol compliant states at the onset of a national lockdown. At the beginning of the ease of lockdown, markets

¹²Isaac Obodo, 47, transporter, Abuja, January 28, 2021

¹³Danladi Tanko, 28, tricycle operator, Life Camp, Abuja, January 28, 2021.

¹⁴. Saka Fache, 55, transporter, Ihima, Kogi state, December 26, 2020.

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in Abuja metropolis were allowed to open twice a week before the final lifting of restrictions around September 2020. Between September 2020 and January 2021, there was a near total collapse in adherence to and enforcement of COVID-19 preventive rules in markets.¹⁵ The second wave of the global COVID-19 infection led to stricter enforcement of safety rules in markets. Market security details were stationed at entry points of markets in Wuse, Utako, Zuba and Kado. The security details made sure that only those in possession of nose masks gain entry into the markets.

Sellers of nose masks stationed themselves at such entry points so that those who did not have could buy.¹⁶ There was a twist to the mode and motive of enforcement of nose masks in the markets. The security details only strictly ensured that every individual displayed a nose mask, putting it on was not their concern. What that meant therefore was that nose masks could just be displayed in any form for them to see, it was not necessary for people to use them. Many of the water dispensing buckets had no water in them for people to wash their hands. This lackadaisical adherence to safety rules led to a temporary closure of some of the markets by the authorities sometimes in January 2021. In markets situated at Madalla, Tunga-Maje, Suleja, Gwagwalada and many other places, no attempts were made to either comply or enforce safety rules.

Educational Institutions

On 19th March 2020, the Federal Government ordered all schools to close down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This closure of institutions came almost the same time that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) embarked on strike action. On 2nd October 2020, the Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu, ordered schools to resume based on the COVID-19 safety guidelines issued by the Presidential

¹⁵Chioma Osagie, 37, shop owner, Wuse market, Abuja, February 12, 2021.

¹⁶Hamza Isa, 42, orange seller, Zuba fruit market, Abuja, February 13, 2021.

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Task Force (PTF). On 23rd December when university lecturers suspended their strike, the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic was underway and therefore the resumption date was further pushed back. By January 18th when schools eventually opened, schools had to grapple with a disrupted academic calendar and ensuring safety from COVID-19 on campuses.¹⁷

A survey of COVID-19 compliance by some institutions reveal average efforts by some and below average efforts by others. At the Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, low efforts were discovered there in terms of compliance and enforcement of regulations. At the main gate and some strategic points, only empty buckets and water basins were available, no water in them. Although security men at the gate made efforts to enforce the use of nose masks, many still found their ways into the campus through some other openings. Within the campus, no attempts were made to enforce the use of nose masks and observance of physical distancing.¹⁸

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) had the second highest COVID-19 infections in Nigeria, but the situation at the University of Abuja does not reflect this. Enforcement of safety measures was weak, no temperature checks, hand washing equipments and hand sanitizers at the gate. The use of facemask was only enforced within the campus. Temperature checks and use of hand sanitizers were however enforced at the entrance of the Senate building. As at the time of gathering data, the students were writing examinations, while use of nose mask was compulsory; the issue of physical distancing was tactically ignored.¹⁹ The case of FCT College of Education Zuba-Abuja was slightly better. At the main gate, security personnel checked peoples' temperature and enforced the use of nose masks by both staff and students. Within the

¹⁷E. Onyeji, "How Nigerian Universities are Managing COVID-19 Crisis", Opera News, February 22, 2021.

¹⁸E. Onyeji, "How Nigerian Universities are Managing...

¹⁹IsahShaibu, 27, student, University of Abuja, February 16, 2021.

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college, inscriptions carrying “No face mask, no entry” adorned entrances of halls, classes and offices. In every department, a water bucket with soap was provided as well as water tanks at strategic places, although throughout February 2021, most of the buckets and tanks had no water in them.²⁰

Compliance with COVID-19 safety measures at Nasarawa State University Keffi was commendable. The level of enforcement and hence, compliance was at an appreciable point as temperature testing gadgets were used at the main gate and entry into major offices. Buckets and soap were not just provided but the authorities ensured that there was water. School officials were swift in calling the attention of students to compliance anytime they failed to use their nose masks.²¹

Low Mortality Rate of COVID-19 in Nigeria

A number of reasons have been forwarded by medical professionals, non-professionals and social analysts in favour of the low death rate recorded by Nigeria during the pandemic. As at February 21, 2021 when the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control recorded 151,553 infections, the United States for instance had 28,707,292. According to a United States based Nigerian medical practitioner, Dr Stella, COVID-19 got to Nigeria the same time it entered the United States but the prevalence of anti-malaria drugs being used by Nigerians reduced the mortality rate. She has the following to say about the issue:

“...when one takes hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin, one tends to recover from COVID-19...in Nigeria, these drugs are easily accessible...in Nigeria or Cameroon, you get anti-malaria from over-the-counter and you get

²⁰John Bulus, 24, student, FCT College of Education, Zuba-Abuja.

²¹E. Onyeji, “How Nigerian Universities...”

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better. They actually treated themselves, unknowingly, of COVID-19, thereby reducing transmission.”²²

She stressed further that in South Africa, anti-malaria drugs are locked and cannot be gotten over-the-counter and that was why the casualty rate was high in that country. In Nigeria, the rich and the poor have had varied experiences in terms of COVID-19 infection. Cases of the infection have been hardly associated with drivers, house-helps and security men of top politicians, businessmen and celebrities who themselves were diagnosed of the ailment.

Some even took the pain to ask their staff if there were cases of infections in their villages or major markets where COVID-19 preventive measures were hardly observed. Dr Doris Ope, a medical practitioner, stated that the prevalence of noticeable COVID-19 infection is less among the lower and fatalities appear to be higher among the upper class. In trying to establish a reason behind this, she attributed it to sunlight. In her words, “people who are daily exposed to sunlight are able to convert some chemicals in their skins to vitamin D, especially D3. Scientists have incontrovertible evidence that vitamin D seriously boosts the human immunity and actually have the capacity to prevent respiratory and lung diseases. In the case of COVID-19, vitamin D3 can prevent infection in some people and in others who still get infected, it decreases the severity of the infection and recovery rate is far better.”²³

Although, Dr Saliu Abdulfatai agrees that vitamin D is obtained from early morning sun and it boosts immunity, he however states that relating death from COVID-19 to lack of the vitamins is baseless. He attributed more deaths in urban areas and among the upper class to the fact that they travel around the globe. Therefore, through frequent

²²“Why Many Nigerians aren’t dying from COVID-19, Dr Stella reveals”, Opera News, February 21, 2021.

²³Dr Doris Ope, Glory Clinics, Garki, Abuja, January 7, 2021.

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travels, the urban rich can easily contact the dreaded virus.²⁴ In a study published in the International Journal of Infectious Diseases, there was a low prevalence of COVID-19 infections and deaths in sub-Saharan Africa compared to the United States, Europe and Asia. According to the study “there is higher prevalence of cross-reactive antibodies against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARSOV-2) in the blood samples...level of antibodies probably because of Africans prior exposure to other human corona viruses.”²⁵

That this situation is obtainable despite more advanced medical facilities, expertise and adherence to safety rules in Europe, Asia and the US appears fascinating. Early in 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had predicted approximately 190,000 deaths in Africa by the end of the year. In contrast, however, as at November 8, Africa recorded about 51,000 deaths, very different from the earlier prediction.²⁶

COVID-19 and Fever in Nigeria

There is a growing feeling, particularly among alternative medical practitioners, of scepticism over the existence of a new disease called COVID-19 in Nigeria. It may however be new to Europe, Asia and the US, but not Nigeria or tropical Africa. The general symptoms associated with COVID-19 are present in common fever treated with herbs and roots in traditional medical practice.²⁷ The attitude of government and the activities of some orthodox medical personnel have heightened disbelief among the Nigerian populace. There is a growing awareness that many other ailments are corruptly and deliberately registered as COVID-19 in some hospitals while figures are allotted at random to

²⁴Dr SalihuAbdulfatai, Kano, February 20, 2021.

²⁵N. Adebawale, “Lower coronavirus prevalence in Africa than the US.- Study”, *Premium Times*, November 29, 2020.

²⁶N. Adebawale, “Lower coronavirus prevalence in Africa...

²⁷Adavize Usman, 72, Herbal Medicine Practitioner, Okaito, Kogi state, March 7, 2021.

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states by the NCDC and the PTF. In herbal practice, there are some commonly known herbs and roots used in the treatment of fever. The severity of ailment determined whether some more particular herbs could be added to treatment. It was the practice also to steam the body of the patient with the herbal collections in order to act on the disease agents at every opening of the body, the mouth, throat, eyes, nose and lungs.²⁸

At the height of the pandemic too, steaming of the body was advocated by orthodox medical experts, with online videos of even the Chinese people using the system as treatment and prevention of COVID-19. With this increased awareness, many Nigerians resorted to herbal alternatives as treatment for COVID-19 and related ailments and they seem to be getting it right. This initiative by Nigerians has rendered the much-taunted devastating effect of the second wave of the pandemic a mere rhetoric.

Nigeria and COVID-19 Vaccine

On Wednesday March 3, 2021, Nigeria received four million doses of AstraZeneca vaccines through COVAX, a World Health Organisation sharing initiative. The vaccine was developed by a British firm, AstraZeneca, working in partnership with Oxford University and licensed by Serum Institute in India. South Africa initially ordered about 1.5 million doses of the vaccine but later rejected it on grounds that it provided insufficient protection against the new COVID-19 variant in the country.²⁹ Concerns have however been raised about the safety of the vaccines with members of the public advancing reasons; some empirical, some superstitious and others political, all in a bid to discredit its use. These concerns, further fuelled by suspension of its use by some European and Asian countries have acted as threats or

²⁸Adavize Usman, 72, Herbal Medicine Practitioner...

²⁹Nike Adebawale and EbukaOnyeji, "COVID-19: Nine things to know about Oxford/AstraZeneca Vaccine Arriving Nigeria", Premium Times, March 15, 2021.

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setbacks to the vaccination campaign plans in Nigeria. Cases of bleeding, blood clots and low platelet counts among people who received the vaccine led countries such as France, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Ireland, Cyprus, Denmark, Austria, Iceland, Bulgaria, Luxemburg, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia to either suspend or postpone its use.³⁰ Despite the suspension of its use by the countries listed above, the Nigerian government went ahead administering it under the pretext that it had been declared safe by the World Health Organisation with the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria at the forefront of advocating for its use.³¹

In a similar development, the National Primary Health Care Development Agency was also at the forefront of dousing growing anxiety surrounding the AstraZeneca vaccine. The agency emphasised the Nigerian government's confidence in the vaccine and will not discontinue its use. The agency maintained that Nigeria did not receive doses from the batch of vaccines which had issues.³² A large section of the Nigerian populace did not appear to be comfortable with the Vaccine. Some felt that it was a ploy by the western world to monitor Africans while others went spiritual by saying that the vaccine was inscribed with the evil 666 anti-Christ sign. Many others linked their rejection of the vaccines to mistrust of government policies and its way of handling the pandemic in general. Still on the rejection, some felt that Nigeria was being used as trial for the vaccine and as such, it was dangerous to receive it. There were insinuations also that there was a grand plan by some powerful individuals in the advanced world to depopulate the African continent. In general, the survey carried out by Premium Times revealed that about 70% of respondents rejected

³⁰Sola Ogundipe and Chioma Obinna, "Concerns over AstraZeneca Vaccine Disrupts Vaccination Campaigns", Vanguard, Vol.27, No.64293, Wednesday, March 17, 2021, p.4.

³¹Sola Ogundipe and Chioma Obinna, "Concerns over AstraZeneca Vaccine..."

³²Chiamaka Okafor, "Nigeria Moves to Douse Anxieties over AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine", Premium Times, March 11, 2021.

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taking the vaccine while some out of the remaining 30% were undecided.³³

Conclusion

At the early days of the pandemic, notable Nigerians, including the Oni of Ife, advocated a home-grown solution to the ailment. He went as far as displaying herbs that could get rid of the symptoms associated with the disease and that it was not new to this part of the World. For reasons associated with either inferiority complex or adverse mental subjugation to anything advocated by white people, our government and scientists continued to wait for world powers to provide the cure. The situation was so pathetic that even as people got treated within and discharged from Nigerian hospitals and isolation centres, health authorities and government still did not believe in themselves. To make matters worse, they were so full of doubts that they could not even disclose what they used in treating the discharged patients.

In alignment with what was happening abroad, the Nigerian authorities enforced a national lockdown without taking into consideration the peculiarities of our environment as well as the level of spread of the disease. Nigeria embarked on lockdown when patients were being discharged from hospitals after treatment but did not find it worthy to direct the citizenry to take such medications and carry on with daily life. An intellectual lacuna was therefore created and so, unscrupulous government officials and health personnel capitalized on it to perpetuate corruption. While government officials at various levels diverted palliatives and quoted fictitious figures used in procuring preventive materials and treatment of the infected, health officials began to declare patients positive of COVID-19. Unsuspecting patients were made to believe that government isolation centres had no equipments and therefore unsafe for their health. They would therefore

³³Nike Adebawale and EbukaOnyeji, "COVID-19: As Nigeria Commences Vaccination, many Citizens Remain Sceptical", Premium Times, March 6, 2021.

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be transferred to private hospitals where they paid heavily for treatment. All these corrupt activities took place and government did nothing to arrest the situation.

The national embarrassment that occurred as a result of the discovery of palliatives intended for the public in warehouses across the states of the federation still did not inform the government that something was wrong with the system. The result was frustration and resentment among the people to an extent that the level of compliance to preventive measures during the second wave of the pandemic fell far below that of the first wave. As at the end of February 2021, life in Nigeria was rapidly returning to its pre-covid state with almost everyone taking observance of COVID-19 rules as mere formality. Those who initially dismissed the pandemic in Nigeria as saw it as means of festering corruption became vindicated and more popular. At the height of seeking for solutions to the ailment, various organs, individuals and groups submitted drugs to the National Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), but nothing was done on them for couple of months. When an African country, Madagascar, supplied herbal remedy to Nigeria, it took NAFDAC months to verify the authenticity before telling the public that it was a malaria remedy. However, when the European Nations, through the World Health Organisation (WHO) shipped vaccines to Nigeria, within forty-eight hours, the vaccines began to reach the states and in not more than seventy-two hours, the President and his Vice got vaccinated.

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3

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Introduction

As far as the study of break out of diseases is concerned, the period of the 20th century is a landmark. This means that series of pandemics were witnessed that led to the death of thousands of people, spurred economic quagmire, various forms of health challenges and lots of hardships in the countries they occurred. Among them were the Sever Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) 2002, broke out in Guangdong province of China (which later spread to about 29 countries) with about 916 fatalities recorded. There was the Bird Flu decimated the

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poultry and claimed 400 lives, Swine Flu, Zika fever, Ebola among others.¹

The Corona Virus 2019 popularly known as COVID-19 was first detected in the city of Wuhan, China and was first reported to the World Health Organization Country Office in China on 3rd December 2019. This pneumonia was later named Corona virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). On 30 January 2020, the outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. As at 14 April 2020, One million, eight hundred and seventy-three thousand, two hundred and sixty-five (1,873,265) cases of COVID-19 (in accordance with the applied case definitions and testing strategies in the affected countries) have been reported across the globe, including One Hundred and eighteen thousand, eight hundred and fifty-four (118 854) deaths.² Bioinformatics analyses indicated that the virus had features typical of the corona virus family and belonged to the Beta corona virus 2B lineage. Alignment of the full-length genome sequence of the COVID-19 virus and other available genomes of Beta corona virus showed the closest relationship was with the bat SARS like corona virus strain BatCov RaTG13, identity 96%.³

The eruption of the COVID-19 has triggered extensive consequences in global society which exponentially increased by the time the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a global pandemic. Apart from the apparent disease consequences on various sectors and sections, in health and mortality, the diverse actions engaged by various

¹ AA Adegoke and other (eds), '21st Century Pandemics: NYSC's Engagements and Opportunities', in Sun KOPA Magazine Photo Album: 21st Century Pandemic, 2020, p. 14

² See, Siyan, P., Adewale, A.E and Olabode' A.O,'Impact of COVID-19 on the Aviation Industry in Nigeria', *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development* (IJTSRD); Volume 4 Issue 5,2020

³Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

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governments at different levels to control the spread of the virus initiated major disorders that have affected all aspects of social and economic activity across the globe. The hefty interdependence on the aviation industry of all economic and social issues and on domestic and international mobility has led it to be one of the hardest-hit industries by the COVID-19 crisis.⁴

On the mandate side, the magnitude of the virus effects the world first became apparent in late January 2020 when the Chinese airlines' domestic traffic fell 6.8%, reflecting the impact of flight cancellations and travel restrictions related to COVID-19. On the same process, the China's Ministry of Transport reported an 80% annual fall in late January and early February. Airlines took out capacity by 0.2% and passenger load factor plunged 5.4 percentage points to 76.7% (International Air Transport Association, 2020). International capacity was also initially slashed as the Chinese Big 3 airlines (Air China, China Eastern and China Southern) slashed international capacity between 80% and 90% in mid-February, 2020.⁵

The Historiography of COVID-19 in Nigeria

In historical scholarship, events are better documented in writing by historians at least 25 years after an incidence takes place. This is to enable a historian to avoid bias in making his/her analysis either by leaving out some important hidden facts on the subject under investigation by some active participants in the event or some people who could provide an eye-witness account on the issue repudiate to release information. However, in some historical events like the COVID-19 pandemic which occurs within the span of multiple years and affects

⁴*Ibid*

⁵KPMG (2020) Aviation Finance Series in the news today: *On-going significance of the COVID-19 Impacts on the Aviation Industry*

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the whole world, historians are encouraged to document the happenings at the time they are taking place in order to have more evidences while writing about the issue in the future. It also makes us to have a better understanding on the different consequences caused by the pandemic in different parts of the world. Now with regards to the NYSC and its role during the COVID-19 in Nigeria which is the focus of this chapter, it faces challenges of collating sources like in writing other historical events. Despite the qualms, the chapter relies on few available published works on the pandemic, newspapers reports on NYSC and the COVID-19 in Nigeria and oral interviews with people who witnessed certain events on the issues.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Nigeria's Economy

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the likelihood of the world's economic recession became a rising concern for countries worldwide. The largest losses, in absolute and relative terms, are recorded in the industrial (-25.9%) and services (-27.5%) sectors, with GDP losses in the services sector (US\$7.6 billion) accounting for over two-thirds of the recorded 23.4% loss in national GDP (US\$11.3 billion). Losses in the agricultural sector are small in absolute terms (US\$0.7 billion), but still significant in relative terms (-7.9%) considering that the sector was exempt from any direct restrictive measures (Elsevier Public Health Emergency Collection,2020). Example, within economic sector, domestic workers such as cooks, childcare providers, cleaners, gardeners, private security guards etc form a large share of the working population within the lockdown zones or states. While some domestic workers reside at their places of work, those who live outside were no longer able to commute to work. We estimated that about half of these workers are live-in workers and continued to work and earn a living during the lockdown period. (Ozili, 2020).

With regard to Nigeria, the largest country in Africa, it also experienced many consequences in its economic growth and development as a

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result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be recalled that after experiencing a recession in 2014, the country started witnessing the growth in its oil exports, resulting to the economic recovery. Unfortunately, the pandemic broke out and halted the process. The country's over dependency on oil exports and the inevitable effects of the nationwide lockdown are two major reasons that aggravated the economic downturn. This means that, the Nigeria's economic sector grieved the same with the economies of other parts of the world(ALG,2020). From both the micro and macro-economic perspectives, Nigeria suffered setbacks hugely. Many small scale industries and market places became closed. This means that unemployment increased because almost all business stopped except on few days when some selected market dealers were allowed to open for people to purchase foodstuff and other shopping materials. Banks were also allowed to operate parallel services in order to have a circular flow of income which would reduce sufferings among households. Now, a major challenge that the government faced was how to educate people in their interactions because the COVID-19 spread during close contacts among individuals. In this case, the NYSC as a stakeholder in all Nigeria's developmental activities engaged it's Corps Members in educating the people how to interact with one another without the spread of the virus.⁶

NYSC and its Immediate Responses during COVID-19 Pandemic

When the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic began to get momentum in Nigeria, the leadership of the NYSC under Brigadier General S Ibrahim did not fold its arms looking at the situation. The first major step taken by the NYSC authority under Brigadier General S Ibrahim was to shut down the 2020 Batch A, Stream 1 Orientation course nationwide. This was followed after the Federal Government's banning of public

⁶ Interview with Madam Emelia

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gatherings in the country.⁷ (NYSC Headquarters, 2020) The Director General further quickly responded to the situation calmly in order to alleviate psychological trauma to the Corp members. In this regard, he conveyed a message to all the Corps members that to remain calm but vigilant in the face of global health threat posed by the COVID-19. He admonished them to always stay tuned on television and radio sets, as well as NYSC Social Media platforms for important information especially on health and security matters. He further advised them to avoid crowds, limit the frequency of interactions with friends, acquaintances and those who do not abide by the simple health professional instructions against the pandemic.

The DG also informed the Corps members that the Federal Government's directives that public servants on grade level 12 and below were barred to their working places included them. Meanwhile, the Corpse medical personnel comprising the doctors, pharmacists and paramedics should offer essential medical services to the nation in line with their professional callings in their respective states of deployment. To facilitate the professional Corps' efforts in the services, the DG implored their employers to give them needed support in their mission of rendering humanitarian services to the nation. The supports include but not limited to availing them of protective wears which are of great essence in the time of pandemic.⁸

At the heyday of the pandemic in Nigeria, there was a circular from the NYSC signed by the acting Director Corps Members Welfare Inspectorate, AR Sanusi directing all the State Coordinators in line with the precautionary measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 virus. The circular which was read thus:

⁷wsnigeria.blogspot.com, COVID-19 Pandemic: NYSC Lending Valuable Hands, 3rd April, 2020

⁸ Interview with Mustafa Mohammed Bakori, 43 years, NYSC Staff, Dutsinma Katsina State, 17th /02/2020

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We are to ensure that Corps all Corps Medical Professionals are on ground in their places of primary assignments to respond to national emergencies. In doing this, we are to adopt all Protective Clothing as provided by the medical authorities. They are to maintain high level of hygiene and refrain from acts that might put them at risk. The State Coordinators, Zonal and Local government inspectors are to bring the content of this circular to the notice of all professional Corps members for compliance.

During the pandemic, the management of the NYSC resolved that all Corps members should remain in their respective states of deployment and appreciated the sacrifices they made in stemming the spread of the disease. This was especially by the Corps Medical Personnel which comprised doctors, nurses, pharmacists, nurses and paramedics. It is very clear from this that, the NYSC stood resolutely in solidarity to the nation around the trying periods.

In the early 2020, as a result of the increasing number of the persons infected by the deadly virus in Nigeria, the isolation centres for treating the patients became scarce in the country. Thus, the government resorted to the use of NYSC Camps throughout the federation to provide enough places for such needs. This order was given by the Minister of Youth, Sport and Development. Consequent upon this, the Director General of the NYSC, Brigadier Ibrahim directed all the State coordinators to prepare suitable hostels and camp's facilities ready for that purpose. Accordingly, they should provide information about any challenge that warrant necessary attention for optimal utilization of the facilities. On this note, the NYSC Kaduna Camp as an isolation centre, provided about 57 Medical Doctors (Corps Members) on standby, an ambulance serviced with a gas cylinders refilled and other required facilities as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the state. The

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NYSC also donated Hands Sanitizers produced by the scheme's Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) Community Development Service (CDS) group to Kaduna State government. The donation was received by on behalf of the state by Mr Isa Balarabe, Director of Pharmaceutical Services who stood in for the commissioner.⁹ In Nassarawa state, the Corps Members were supported in this kind of effort by the Corps' Director General and the Corps' officials when they presented face masks to the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sport Development. The items were received on behalf of the Ministry by the Permanent Secretary, Mr Gabriel Aduda.¹⁰ On this same gesture, the NYSC produced face masks in bulk and submitted to the Kaduna State government as a measure to stem the spread of the pandemic in the state. This was also extended to Oyo state and other parts of the federation.¹¹

NYSC and its Impact on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

The National Youth Service Corps under the able leadership of Brigadier General S Ibrahim played positive roles to counter the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic through different ways in Nigeria. These are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs:

Food Palliative and Hand Sanitizers

It is inarguable that one of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide was the shortage of food and other life needed materials as result of the stay-at-home or lockdown policy especially to the poor families who constituted the majority. This has resulted to sufferings of

⁹ wsnigeria.blogspot.com, Fight Against COVID-19 Pandemic: NYSC Donates Hand Sanitizers to Kaduna State Government, 15th April, 2020

¹⁰ wsnigeria.blogspot.com, NYSC and Fight Against COVID-19 Pandemic: More Contribution from NYSC, 09/04/2020

¹¹ wsnigeria.blogspot.com, Fight Against COVID-19 Pandemic: NYSC Donates Hand Sanitizers to Kaduna State Government, 15th April, 2020

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thousands of small earning families all over the world. To address the human sufferings, governments and non-governmental organizations provided free relief materials such as food, cloth and so on free to the needy-people in order to supplement the human difficulties brought about by the obnoxious situation. In Nigeria, Corps Members in different parts of the country with the support of the officials at all levels (federal, state and local government) contributed money, purchased food and other essential items and have distributed to the less privileged persons in the society.¹²Similarly, there were many personal efforts by individual Corp Members in many places donating food free to people in their communities of primary assignments.

During the heyday of the pandemic, as one of the strategies against the spread of the disease among people, the World Health Organization encouraged the use of hand sanitizer because of the handshaking interactions among individuals. The NYSC in Nigeria under its Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development produced a donated alcohol based hand sanitizers free to many organizations in the country. In Kaduna state, such gesture was presented to the State government by Alhaji Isa Wana, the NYSC Coordinator of the State on behalf of the Corps Members. The intervention was presented through the Ministry of Health and was collected by the Director of Pharmaceutical who stood in for the Commissioner.¹³In addition to this collective efforts of the Corps Members, individual among them also played an important role in this task. For instance, a Corps Member from Ogun state, Adefisoye Adesola Joseph, personally produced and donated about 100 pieces of hand washing liquid soaps to the State government's COVID-19 Programme. This presentation was received in

¹²wsnigeria.blogspot.com, COVID-19 Pandemic: NYSC Lending Valuable Hands, 03/04/2020

¹³A Adenike and others, (ed), 'NYSC Kaduna Presents Hand Sanitizers to State Government', Kaduna COPA Magazine: A Publication of the Press and Public Relations Unit, 2020 p. 16

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Abeokuta by the Commissioner for Health, Dr Tomi Coker on behalf of the Ogun State government.¹⁴



Hand Sanitizers made by Corps members

Education

This is another critical area affected by the COVID-19 worldwide and in Nigeria in particular. The pandemic resulted to the closure all school for months which rendered students lacked continuity in their educational pursuits. In Europe, America, Canada, Middle East and the

¹⁴ I Emmanuel, 'Corps Member Donates Liquid Soap to COVID-19 Programme', Ogun COPA End of Service Year Magazine: A Publication of NYSC Ogun State, p.14, 2020

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rest parts of the world, universities, colleges, post-primary and primary schools were closed down. Academic activities were completely stopped. But with the advancement in technology of the industrialized states, lectures and teachings became virtually online using sophisticated internet facilities. Around this period in Nigeria, when the lockdown exercise became prolonged, some undisciplined university students started misbehaving in the society by committing burglary, rape and so on. Post-primary and primary children became stranded of over-staying at home. Consequently, the government resorted to teaching of students through the use of media especially radio stations.¹⁵In this regard, the state governments in all parts of the country played important roles. Teachers were sponsored to teach various subjects according to the current approved syllabus particularly to Senior Secondary School 3 students and those at Junior Secondary School 3.¹⁶ As a partner in Nigeria's educational development, the NYSC at this critical period introduced the Educating Girls in New Enterprise (ENGINE) Community Development Service (CDS) Group which partnered with the NYSC Gender Vanguard CDS Group and a reputable Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to make education accessible to all secondary school students in Nigeria as a response to the COVID-19 lockdown which made it untenable for the students to resume studies at their various schools. The partnership has resulted to the setting up of online classes by Corps Members and creation of tailored courses for each class in line with the Federal Ministry of Education approved schemes of work. This has no doubt kept the students engaged or active in their studies.

¹⁵ Interview with Emelia Tanko, National Youth Service Corps, Kaduna Office,
15th/02/2021

¹⁶ Interview with Mr Kabiru Zubairu, public affairs commentator, Kawa Kaduna,
16th/02/2021

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It can be recalled that, one fundamental function of NYSC scheme in Nigeria is teaching Nigerian youth especially school children different skills acquisition under the Corps Members' CDS groups for self-sustenance. With the COVID-19 this was stopped due to the restrictions imposed on the movements of people. However, looking at the above discussed consequences of the stay-at-home on the attitudes of some children, the NYSC decided to be using videos on same skills acquisitions training and sending to different beneficiaries. Similarly, the videos were uploaded on the NYSC's social media websites.¹⁷



Corps Members Sowing Face Mask

¹⁷ Interview with Emelia Tanko, National Youth...,

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Fumigation of Camps

When the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 persisted throughout the world, there have been calls from different people for the stakeholders in the health sector to devise means of resuming normal life amidst of the pandemic. This was as a result of an untold negative impact created by the pandemic. In Nigeria, after the prolonged closure of the NYSC Orientation Camps across the country due to the outbreak of the pandemic, the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) commended the management of NYSC Scheme for the measures taken to protect the Corps Members and Staff against contracting the virus.¹⁸ The Director General of the NCDC, Dr Chike Ihekwezu ensured adequate preparations against infection, prevention and control were taken for safe activities in the Camps.¹⁹

Another interesting step taken by the NYSC in this regard was that, being the Corps as a stakeholder in the development of different sectors in Nigeria collaborated with state Governments in fumigation of the NYSC Camps throughout the country. For instance, in Ogun state, the governor, Prince Dapo Abiodun directed the State's Ministry of Environment to fumigate the NYSC State secretariat in Abeokuta. Expressing appreciation of the gesture on behalf of the NYSC, the State Coordinator Dr (Mrs) Belinda Ameze Faniyi thanked the State Government.²⁰ In Ebonyi state, Governor David Umahi as a proactive step towards renovating the NYSC Camp at Akpibo as a move of providing a conducive atmosphere for Camp activities upon resumption in the state.²¹

¹⁸ A Adenike and others, (ed), 'COVID-19: PTF, NCDC Okay Resumption of NYSC Orientation Programme', *A Journal of NYSC Directorate Headquarters*, p. 5

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Interview with Mustafa Mohammed Bakori, NYSC Staff Dutsinma, Katsina State, 15th /03/2021

²¹ A Adenike and others, (ed)Ebonyi Governor Commends NYSC Over COVID-19 Prevention', *A Journal of NYSC Directorate Headquarters*, p.15

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Prevention Materials

Corps Members under the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme of the NYSC Lagos state have produced many pandemic contravention materials. These include, 300 pieces of filtered face masks, 80 pieces of disinfectant hand wash, 3 large packs of hand gloves, 300 pieces of 100mls hand sanitizers and 5 four litres surface sanitizer cleaner. The Lagos State Coordinator Mr Eddy Megwa inspected the items and handed them over to the State's Commissioner for Special Duties and Intergovernmental Relations, Engineer Tayo Bagmbose Martins.²²In Issele-Uku of Delta state, the Corps Members stormed in a large number led by the state coordinator, Mrs Olutayo Samuel with the Chairman of the Aniocha local government, Honorable Chuks Oseme went round in the Burr Primary School market area. They educated the village marketers about the importance of the face masks around this period of the spread of the disease. They cleared the wrong perceptions about the face masks that they were brought from China as infected rags to spread the disease in Nigeria. At this outing, the face masks were accepted by about 18 representatives of the communities that made up of the local government. In addition to the face masks, hand sanitizers were also distributed free to the villagers and were educated on how to use them.²³

²² wsnigeria.blogspot.com, More Contributions from NYSC on Fight Against COVID-19: Lagos Corps Members Donate to State Government, 14th April, 2020.

²³ P. Ochei, 'COVID-19: NYSC Distributes Face Masks to Market Women in Issele-Uku', Delta State, Delta State NYSC, <https://nysceditorialdelta.blogspot.com/2020/04/15>, 15th April, 2020

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Covid-19 Sensitization in the market

According to the Punch Newspaper, by the middle of the April 2020 when the number of infected individuals passed 300 in Nigeria, the NYSC authority under the leadership of Brigadier General S Ibrahim informed Nigerians that through the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) the NYSC was at forefront in the production of hand sanitizers and face masks for free distribution to people in the country. According to him, this was a determination to effectively contribute to the national efforts at stemming the tide and complied with the Presidential directives to NYSC by releasing its orientation camps and facilities to serve as isolation centres.²⁴

Innovation and Creativity

Another interesting area in which the NYSC responded positively at the period of COVID-19 in Nigeria is through encouraging it's Corps Members with engineering discipline background to innovate or create certain gadgets that would either assist in addressing the challenge of the virus or aid to contravene it. In this effort, the Director General, Brigadier General S Ibrahim charged the Corps Members to be more

²⁴ O. Aluko, 'Corps Members Produce Distribute Face Marks Across 20 States', The Punch Online Newspaper 14th April, 2020

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creative at this challenging period at all levels. As a response to this, in Oyo state, three Corps Members constructed Semi-automated Hand Washing equipment with soap dispensing mechanism and underground drainage system. The device was created for the use of members of Staff, Corps Members and visitors to the State's Secretariat in Agodi, Ibadan. The three initiators of this project were Afolabi Victor, Ogunmoye Victor and Adeyanju Adeyemi.²⁵

On the same effort, a Corps Member from Kano, Abdullahi Sani constructed a Leg press hand wash improved mechanism at the NYSC Secretariat in Kano.²⁶



Semi-Automated Hand Washing Equipment Constructed by Three Corps Members in Oyo State.

²⁵ wsnigeria.blogspot.com, 'Fight Against COVID-1 Pandemic: Innovative Hand washing Equipment from NYSC', April 2020

²⁶ wsnigeria.blogspot.com, 'Fight Against the COVID-19 Pandemic: More Innovative Contributions from NYSC', April 2020

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Conclusion

In the final analysis of the forgoing discussions, the chapter surveyed the occurrence of diseases in the past which became part of the development of human history. It examined some of the major pandemics that broke out in the world before the famous CORONA Virus. The chapter highlighted the emergence of the COVID-19 and how it made a devastating impact on the economy of the world and that of Nigeria in particular. It also demonstrated the role played by NYSC under the leadership of Brigadier General and an Associate Professor, S Ibrahim as a stakeholder in general development of Nigeria and combating the threats posed by the pandemic. It is no doubt from the above discussion that, the NYSC has indeed become a result oriented scheme and continued to serve the purpose of its establishment in 1973.

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National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and the Challenges of COVID-19

4

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Bako, Y. Kasang Basham

Introduction

As a global phenomenon COVID-19 (Corona virus) is a contagious disease that has ravaged the entire world creating a new approach to intra, inter, bilateral and multilateral engagements. Covid19 stems from a large family of viruses like the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The disease has the propensity of sending millions of people to their early graves and has permanently altered the course of human existence and created a radical shift in socio-economic activities, political

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contestations in international relations and cooperation. This study briefly interrogates the history of Covid-19, its global spread in Europe, Asia and its subsequent spread to Africa and specifically Nigeria. The study clarifies the term Corona virus, its contagiousness, spread and challenges on human development vis-a-vis Nigeria Youth Service Corps.

COVID-19 (Corona virus)

Covid19 is described as a large family of viruses known to cause illnesses ranging from common cold to more severe diseases like Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)¹. Research shows that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans in China in 2002 and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans in Saudi Arabia in 2012². However, World Health Organisation believes that corona viruses are still circulating in animals that are yet to infect humans.

The corona virus first case manifested in Wuhan China commonly referred to as ‘corona virus’, ‘Wuhan corona virus and sometimes “Wuhan Pneumonia”. Reports indicate that there are more than 118 million reported cases of Covid19 around the world and over 2.6 million deaths³.

Records show that America alone lost over half a million people with more than 20 million jobs vanishing, the worst toll ever recorded since the end of the great Depression⁴. The first Nigerian case of Covid-19 manifested on the 27th January 2020 following the return of an Italian citizen working in Nigeria from Milan, Italy to Lagos.

¹*The Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal* - An Official Publication of the European Society for Pediatric Infectious Disease, Vol.24, Issue.11, 2005, p. 223.

² *The Pediatric Infectious*, ..., p.223.

³ *New York Times Database* @www.nytimes.com.

⁴ *New York Times*...

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Since then, there had been rising cases of covid-19 accompanied by series of deaths all over Nigeria with more than one hundred and sixty thousand confirmed cases and over two thousand deaths since the index case.

The World Health Organization had earlier in 2020 declared that the world was in pandemic of COVID-19 following trails of deaths and sufferings across the globe despite tight restrictions in China⁵ to prevent global spread of the disease. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulties. Incidentally, other severe infections aside Covid-19 can cause illnesses that may present symptoms similar to pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and death⁶.

Corona virus could be transmitted from person to person, usually after close contact with an infected patient in public places which is mostly crowded. Although research had earlier indicated non-availability of a clinically established cure for the disease, many of the symptoms could be treated based on the patient's experimental condition and an extremely effective result achieved when the infected person is being given supportive care. To prevent world wide spread of the scourge, WHO recommends observance of Covid-19 protocol through constant wearing of face masks, regular washing of hands and use of hand sanitizers. The standard recommendations to reduce exposure to and transmission of a range of illnesses include maintaining basic hand and respiratory hygiene, safe food practices and avoiding close contact when possible, with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing⁷.

⁵https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_3

⁶<http://www.emro.who.int/health-topics/corona-virus/questions-and-answers.html>

⁷Aghadi Ifaenyi, 45years, Medical Doctor, Interviewed in Kaduna, on February 17,2021.

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It is worthy to note that the world at large, Nigeria inclusive, suffers a double socio-political and economic shock heralded by the Covid-19 (Corona virus) pandemic destabilizing existing states structures and general lives of people from social interactions, education, governance, economic activities to transport and communication⁸. This development postulates inherent questions and general world survey on the extent to which the global pandemic has affected the psyche of human existence and possible evolution of a new global system.

National Youth Service Corps

The antecedents of Nigeria's national history paved way for the establishment of National Youth Service Corps by decree No.24 of 22nd May 1973 under then military government of General Yakubu Gowon with a mandate to build a pragmatic organization that is committed to its set objectives⁹. Its ultimate goal is of producing future leadership with positive national ethos- leadership that is vibrant, proud and committed to the unity and even development of the Nigerian State. At inception, the NYSC scheme was aimed at creating a melting pot for youths to identify closely with the country's grassroots, share their views and vision for Nigeria, and cultivate the virtues of diligence and assiduity.¹⁰ The scheme also aimed to be at the forefront of national development efforts and be a veritable platform for imparting in youths the values of nationalism, patriotism, loyalty and accountability in leadership.

Through the above mentioned process, the scheme has over the years successfully mobilized and redeployed youth from various parts of the country to serve in communities unknown to them. This gesture has, to

⁸ Micha Ilisha, 48years, Civil Servant, Interviewed in Kaduna, on February 18, 2021.

⁹ *NYSC Year Book, 20th Anniversary Edition, 1973-1993*, Gabumo Publishing Company, Lagos, 1993, p.7.

¹⁰ President Ibrahim Babangida on the occasion of the presidents NYSC Honours Award ceremony, Dec 7, 1991 in, *NYSC Year Book, 20th Anniversary Edition, 1973-1993*, Gabumo Publishing Company, Lagos, 1993, p.7.

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a large extent, generated a new leadership class through religious tolerance, unity of purpose – inter-marriages and socio-cultural bonding of youths who emerged through the NYSC program that created burning patriotic zeal to serve their country.

To this end, the NYSC scheme had accelerated community development efforts and remained a core programme of passionate experience presenting a wide range of opportunities amongst Nigerian youths¹¹. The scheme has fashioned youths' attitude and mind through shared experience and training thereby making them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest while at the same time inculcating the spirit of self-reliance which is a reliable source of economic empowerment and effective participation in nation building.¹²

While the NYSC scheme is being applauded to have stood the test of time, its benefit to the entire nation – enforcing integration through cross cultural fusions, trade and community developments - are innumerable. Suffice, therefore, to say that the NYSC scheme is not without its own inherent challenges; the programme successfully witnessed growth, resurgence and continuous self-renewal since its inception. The increasing number of Nigerian graduates enrolling in the NYSC scheme has been a major challenge which necessitated an increase in the number of batches for its orientation within the service year to three - a feat that has supported and saw mass turn out of Nigerian youths.

The most outstanding contribution of the scheme towards national development is visible in its community development programmes which seeks to effect transformation in the rural and urban areas by galvanizing corps members as agents of change to initiate and execute

¹¹ Abubakar Shehu, 25 years, Recently Passesd out Corp Member, Interviewed in Kaduna, on February 18, 2021.

¹² NYSC Year Book,...,p.7.

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projects of community needs¹³through - polio sensitization and immunization programs, HIV/AIDs awareness campaigns, Road safety education to the communities, voter registration and election processes among a variety of other programs.

However, practicability and sustenance of the NYSC scheme amidst the prevalent rate of Covid-19 pandemic has raised increasing concerns for the youths who are the primary beneficiaries of skill acquisitions, financial empowerment-cum-mobilization, the government as well as the larger communities. As a programme that converges thousands of youths in camps for orientations and where three weeks social interactions are unavoidable, there are bound to be challenges of the scheme's viability on prevention of further spread of COVID-19.

Challenges

The compelling need to ensure strict compliance with all COVID 19 safety protocols prompted all critical stakeholders to leave no stone unturned in accomplishing that in the light of this, the Director-General, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim directed all states and FCT coordinators to ensure that NCDC safety protocols are enforced in all camps and other formations of the Scheme nationwide.¹⁴ As can be deduced from the on the spot assessment of NYSC's preparedness, this challenge was taken seriously. Already Federal Government has warned that failure to comply with the regulations guiding safety of lives at the orientation camps could attract sanctions and imminent closures¹⁵.

The NYSC Director General had applauded the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and NCDC for considering re-opening of the NYSC orientation camps while hinging on the fact that corps members are

¹³ Ben Nwazueze, in *NYSC Year Book*, ... , p.7.

¹⁴ www.nysc.gov.ng.

¹⁵ <https://www.thecable.ng/fg-to-shut-down-nysc-camps-that-violate-covid-19-protocol>

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critical change agents in national development agenda whose potentials will continue to be effectively harnessed in the health, education and other vital sectors of the economy¹⁶. This is a pointer that corps members will be useful in the enlightenment campaign in the curbing and flattening of COVID-19 curve by ensuring that all protocols are observed. It is also believed that corps members would contribute in creating better ways of adapting to the challenges of Covid-19. This notwithstanding, other analysts believe observance of Covid-19 protocols is also the best option in the sustenance and preservation of the NYSC operations in contemporary times.

It is now evident that corps members can serve as bastions of enlightenment and sensitization on any emergency situation like the dreaded COVID-19 pandemic¹⁷.

The NYSC Scheme assured the nation that it has provided necessary facilities that will enhance compliance with COVID-19 prevention and safety protocols in the camps while prospective corps members and camp officials have all been subjected to corona virus test as a precondition for entry into the orientation camps.

Considering prevailing circumstances, it is factual to hinge that all countries of the world are left with no options but to make hard decisions to protect economies from total collapse and ensure smooth running of government through diverse adjustments to cope with changes created by Covid-19. These changes are inevitable leaving people with no options but to adapt to the changes presented by the times. The NYSC therefore, is not an exception since the world economy and social development have created alternatives of ensuring that human activities continue through virtual programs to minimize physical contacts and spread of the COVID-19 virus.

¹⁶www.nysc.gov.ng.

¹⁷Ali Musa, 50 Years, Civil Servant, Interviewed in Zonkwa on February, 27.

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Since the federal government was convinced with the contributions of corps members, it shovved the idea of suspending NYSC orientation for a period of two years which will not be in the nation's interest.

With this appreciative development, NYSC would be more responsive in ensuring that officials and corps members adapt to changes as the situation improves.

Conclusion

The aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War ushered in the NYSC scheme to bridge fears and suspicions of the existing Nigerian compositions (North, East, South and West) against the other. The programme was created in 1973 as an integrating factor to promote peaceful coexistence, religious tolerance, and cooperation among Nigerians. After so many years, NYSC still remains the only sustainable Federal Government programme that has stood the test of time since its inception. It has been an integration process for graduates drawn from different states of the federation. Graduates of universities and polytechnics are usually enthusiastic to serve their fatherland and acquire experience through skills acquisition; community developments as well get remunerated. NYSC makes youths leave their comfort zones, traditions and cultures to live in areas where they are influenced by other different groups and cultures.

It is certain that the global pandemic that has disrupted the world system has also created some lingering challenges for the NYSC scheme, giving rise to calls from government and concerned citizens to either suspend mobilization to orientation camps or scrap the programme.

Rather than government in collaboration with the NYSC, Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and NCDC to device alternative measures to manage the pandemic; implement the recommendations of the Economic Sustainability Committee (ESC) headed by Nigeria's Vice

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President Yemi Osinbajo to suspend mobilization to orientation camps for two years in order to limit the rising cases of infections, the Federal Government jettisoned those recommendations. This decision is hinged on facts that corps members are critical change agents in national development agenda, whose potentials will continue to be effectively harnessed in the health, education and other vital sectors of the economy.

In view of the fact that NYSC orientation camps are suitable grounds for the fast spread of the Corona virus disease, the management of the scheme assures compliance with all COVID-19 protocols, cutting down of interactions – physical and religious activities-while most engagements will be through virtual meetings. Corps members are subjected to tests on arrival at the camps and those found to be positive are isolated and treated for COVID-19 at NCDC designated health facilities. Certainly, the above mentioned measures are laudable and admirable; however, there still remained other aspects of managing the avalanche of young graduates waiting to participate in the programme. The feasibility of effectively managing thousands of youths in each camp, while simultaneously mitigating the incidences of COVID-19, remains debatable. However, there is deliberate reduction in the number of corps participant per camp to ensure effective compliance with social distancing protocol.

It is imperative to note that Covid-19 will have to be accepted as part of human existence yet, it is expedient to adjust organisational operations and people's life styles to suit the changing world.

Rather than suspend the scheme that had always knitted the country together due to COVID-19 emergency, there are valuable options adopted to strengthen the NYSC scheme which maximally harnessed the potentials of corps members in responding to critical national needs.

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With workable suggestions like virtual lectures and improvement in camp capacity, congestion will be reduced, more health facilities will pave way for a conducive environment to survive any emergency situation.



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The NYSC and COVID-19: Assessing the Impact

Aweng Johnson

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all sectors of our lives and changed the normal way we do things. It has forced us to embrace the “new normal” by adjusting our operations to be in conformity with Prevention and safety protocols. The NYSC scheme was not exempted from the impact of the pandemic because it caused the suspension of the routine operations of the programme.

When the Federal Government announced lockdown to curb the spread of the dreaded virus, the scheme halted its engagements like other agencies. However, it redirected its focus on servicing immediate national needs. It remained very visible as the scheme harnessed the

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talents of corps members for various interventions especially in producing preventive materials like facemasks, hand sanitizers, hand washing basins and sample collection booths.

Subsequently when the lockdown was lifted, the scheme mobilized 66,000 prospective corps members to camps in all the states amidst rising fears of the spread of the virus. The NYSC Director General alongside his counterpart of the NCDC assured the nation that the scheme has put in place essential measures in all orientation Camps in line with prevention and safety protocols for corps members.

The NYSC was affected by Covid 19 in an unprecedented way. In view of this, the managers of the NYSC scheme strategized and came up with robust measures in response to the pandemic by mobilising human resources at its disposal. Corps members who were in the medical profession were channelled to support health institutions all over Nigeria, while the CDS groups were charged with creating immediate awareness about precautionary measures about Covid-19. Through the NYSC SAED, corps members produced and distributed massive tons of face mask across the nation while at the institutional level, the NYSC directorate put in place a qualitative structure that permitted the reopening of camps. Certain protocols were to be observed by staffs and corps members alike while certain provisions were made such as hand sanitisers and rapid testing kits. This paper therefore, examines in details the impact of Covid 19 on NYSC focusing on the response and continuity of the NYSC as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A General Overview of Challenges Confronting the NYSC

From the inception of the scheme, the NYSC could be argued to have touched and encompass almost every aspect of the Nigerian life. It has developed from its establishment to a significant and permanent attribute of national integration in Nigeria. While there is no doubt on the relevance and effectiveness of the scheme, its future and continuity are persistently confronted with a plethora of challenges interfacing it.

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Some of these challenges are inadequate manpower, paucity of funds, environmental challenges, overstretched camp facilities, misperception by hostile cultures , insufficient accommodation, complacency among corps members , discontent by some parents and corps members and other related hiccups .¹Some researchers have argued that the problems mentioned above are issues that are extraneous to the scheme and were borne out of the initial hurry in the establishment of the scheme due to the immediate integration need of the country. While some of the problems have been as a result of political developments and some challenges borne out of the economic recession and the consequent review of budgetary priorities.² While still trying to find a handle on these numerous challenges and issues, the country has been battling with insecurity.³It is undisputable that these security concerns are constituting some impediments to the renewed vigour of the scheme.

COVID-19 and the NYSC Scheme

It cannot be argued that the advent of the Covid-19 virus had wreaked havoc on the global community and has also changed the established order of events in almost every, if not all, countries around the world.⁴ Following the steps of other nations and the WHO, a ban was placed on flights from countries with increased rate of transmission and later compulsory lock down was enforced by the federal government on March 30, 2020 in three states of the federation; Lagos, Ogun and Abuja

¹Gregory Enegwea and Gabriel Umoden, “NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service”, (Lagos: Gabumo Publishing Company Limited, 1993) 182.

² Gregory Enegwea and Gabriel Umoden, “NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service”.

³Aremu Fatai Ayinde, “National Youth Service Corps Programme and the Quest for National Integration: Issues for Policy Consideration”, Journal of Management and Social Sciences, 2018, 279-296.

⁴www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/14/nigeria-protect-most-vulnerable-covid-19-responses. See also: The First 90 Days: How has Nigeria responded to the COVID-19 Outbreak?, <https://nigeriahealthwatch.medium.com/>

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while other states gradually followed suit as the months progressed. Borders were shut, interstate travel banned, offices, schools, markets, hotels and services classified as non-essentials were closed.⁵

Commendable was the fact that the NYSC had earlier shut down their orientation camps on the 18th of March thereby disrupting the orientation of the 2020 Batch-A Stream-1 across the federation a week into the exercise and discharged them to their various places of primary assignment.

As part of the necessary steps in curtailing the spread of the virus, isolation centres were opened in various parts of the country. Commendable was the swift compliance of the NYSC scheme to the presidential directive to release its orientation camp facilities nationwide to serve as isolation centres and its immediate arrangement for the provision of relevant facilities to enhance effective usage of the camps were made.⁶ Furthermore, the scheme in consonance with its corps members joined in the fight against covid-19 as corps medical teams of doctors, nurses and laboratory scientists across the federation joined their counterparts and other health professionals in the frontline, providing services in various health facilities and working with some NGO's to test patients.⁷ Other corps members made impact through the SAED program by the mass production and donation of face masks, antiseptic dispensers and hand sanitizers. They equally fabricated and donated automatic and foot-operated water, liquid soaps and hand sanitizers as well as disinfection

⁵ The First 90 Days: How has Nigeria responded to the COVID-19 Outbreak?, [https://nigeriahealthwatch.medium.medium.com/](https://nigeriahealthwatch.medium.com/)

⁶ Covid-19:NYSC Corps Members Sustain Campaigns against the Pandemic, <https://prnigeria.com/2020/04/07/covid-nysc-corps-sustain-campaigns>

⁷ See also, Covid-19: NYSC Corps Members Sustain Campaigns against the Pandemic, <https://prnigeria.com/2020/04/07/covid-nysc-corps-sustain-campaigns> Accessed February 18, 2021.

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chambers in several states for their fellow corps members, State Government and their host communities.⁸

Another important role of the scheme was visible through corps members who engaged in sensitization campaigns through radio, television and other social media outlets. They became vanguards of the lockdown and adherence to the Covid-19 rules and protocols. Besides, most of the central activities for serving corps members such as the monthly signing of clearance, weekly and monthly Community Development Service (CDS) were suspended; and also passing out parade (POP) reduced to clearance as a result of the pandemic and lockdown. The NYSC orientation exercise was also suspended to prevent the risk of transmission of the disease through inter-state travels.⁹

With the resumption of camp activities in late 2020 after the lock down had been eased, there have been visible effects of Covid-19 on the scheme and its programs. The gradual easing of the lockdown and the resumption of socio-economic, educational and political activities led the NYSC to reopen their orientation camps for its corps members and the NYSC community. Working in conjunction with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the NYSC put in place certain measures to prevent infections and early identification of outbreaks in the various orientation camps across the federation. Such measures included the fumigation of orientation camps nation-wide to ensure environmental hygiene, the use of rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) approved by WHO to screen its members, a National Guideline detailing the camp activities was developed to keep prospective corps members informed on vital

⁸ Covid-19:NYSC Corps Members Sustain Campaigns against the Pandemic,
<https://prnigeria.com/2020/04/07/covid-nysc-corps-sustain-campaigns> Accessed February 18, 2021

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measures to help in reducing the risk of infection amongst many others.¹⁰

With the above measures set in place, the NYSC with approval from the federal government went further in November to mobilize 66,000 prospective corps members to camps in different parts of the state amidst rising fears of the spread of the virus, although, the Director General assured Nigerians that the scheme has put in place essential measures endorsed by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in all orientation Camps in-line with the protocols for the safety of corps members.¹¹ Sources confirmed that the NYSC as an organization and a vast community responsible for hosting large number of persons yearly took measures to ensure its activities are carried out successfully in the face of Covid-19 by ensuring medical scrutiny of its corps members and staffs at its orientation camps, isolating and reporting of all suspected case, general adherence to the Covid-19 protocols within and outside camps.¹²

The proactive steps adopted by the scheme in response to the contemporary global health challenge posed by Covid-19 will remain a worthwhile agenda in the archives as it has secured its place in the annals of the nation's development.

¹⁰ Covid-19: Safe Re-opening of NYSC Orientation Camp in Nigeria, <https://ncdc.gov.ng/reports/282/2020-october-week-43> Accessed 24 February 2021.

¹¹ Luminous Jannamike, "NYSC Deploys 66,000 Corps Members for Orientation Exercise Tuesday", www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2020/11/nysc-deploys-66,000-corps-members-for-orientation-exercise-tuesday/amp/ Accessed February 18, 2021.

¹² Oral Interview with Saliu Aliyu Saliu, Serving 2020 Batch B Corp Member in Kaduna State, February 20, 2021

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The Impact of COVID-19 on NYSC Scheme

The Covid-19 virus had brought about a significant change in the world which cannot be overlooked, and Nigeria is not left out from these changes. The virus had significantly transformed the established order of events in the country and this has upset almost every-if not all-sectors of the country and has also left the economy of the country falling into recession.

Corps members were greatly involved in many activities during the total lockdown which culminated into humanitarian interventions and helping out in efforts to curb the spread of the virus. Most of the corps members especially those in schools, private and government institutions were part of the 'stay at home' populations as a result of the lockdown and restrictions in movements all over the country.

¹³This immediately led to the modifications in the NYSC calendar and also laid out plans of actions as to be carried out by the scheme. At initial stage, the pandemic became a stumbling block in the achievement of the scheme's objectives and goals. This was the feeling of those corps members whose activities were halted and found themselves serving during the period of the pandemic under strict lockdown. They were not privileged enough to reap from the numerous benefits that come with the compulsory one-year service especially in terms of skills acquisition and requisite work experience.

So, it is only accurate to say that the pandemic has, in fact, appear to be a major test to how effective the scheme should be. This challenge was seriously taken as the NYSC designed camp reopening plans which incorporated those 2020 Batch A corps members who missed skills acquisition training and later recalled them to camp in groups.

For safe reopening of the camp, and in order to curtail the spread of the virus, the NYSC introduced some measures such as the reduction in the

¹³ Oral Interview with Bilal Sulieman Ishaq and Liman Mohammed, Ex-Corp Members.

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number of mobilized graduates which is a challenge to the policy of deploying corps members to all areas of national needs and vulnerable communities. Other measures include; frequent washing of hands, restriction of movements, enforcing social distancing, wearing of nose masks and the compulsory rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) approved by WHO and the establishment of isolation centres within the camp in the event of infected persons.¹⁴

In an effort to comply with these measures, the corps members might lose the enthusiasm, motivations, and the anticipated fun of camp activities. This, if not properly checked, might predispose them to carry the same attitude after camp to their various Places of Primary Assignments. Therefore, the need for the NYSC officials to intensify their efforts in stimulating, inspiring, and sensitizing corps members who may have lost interest in the scheme became imminent. All these measures were taken to ensure that NYSC programmes were not stagnated considering their impact to the nation.

In critically examining the other sectors where the impact of the scheme remain visible, we need to mention key sectors like education and health care services. The scheme has also met the expectations of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for adhoc staffs in conducting elections at all levels. This underscores the need for the scheme to redouble its efforts and realign its intervention drive towards sustaining visible influence so as to continue to achieve more in these areas.¹⁵ There is also the need for the re-assessment of the posting policy and monitoring strategy in order to harness the knowledge, utilize the strength and tap the skills of corps members by engaging in

¹⁴ Covid-19: Safe Re-opening of NYSC Orientation Camp in Nigeria,
<https://ncdc.gov.ng/reports/282/2020-october-week-43> Accessed 24 February 2021.

¹⁵ Oral interview with Mr Josiah Sunday, NYSC Secretariat Staff in Kebbi State, February 24, 2021.

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more critical national assignments. To accomplish this, the scheme needs to reconsider and expand the posting policy to include areas that will be beneficial to Corps members during and after their service year. Corps members are seen as agents of positive change by the citizenry and are popularly known and seen as "*government pikin*". The government needs to fully incorporate and harness the large work force/manpower/youthful resources of the scheme in the fight against the virus by making them part of the research team in search for indigenous solutions and also to reach the rural areas with effective sensitization programs and continue to encourage other necessary community development projects.¹⁶

The NYSC scheme has taken giant steps in collaborating with various national and international organizations at different levels to train and equip corps members with necessary experience and competence needed for their post-services year. One key area that requires such collaborations is the Skills acquisition and Entrepreneurship development (SAED). The aim of this programme is to tackle the issue of unemployment in the country by incorporating skills required for self-employment in the face of unfavorable economic conditions.¹⁷ Although there is comprehensive in-camp and post-camp SAED training, there is need for the scheme to seek more partnership in order to upgrade the training to what is needed for the 21st century such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Radio Machine learning and other contemporary technological skills. This will keep the youths at par with their contemporaries around the world.

¹⁶Oral Interview with Angel Dominic, serving Corp Member in Kaduna State, February 24, 2021.

¹⁷Oral Interview with Angel Dominic, serving Corp Member in Kaduna State, February 24, 2021.

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Lastly, in consolidating one of the many objectives of the scheme which is national integration, it will be necessary to ensure the equitable distribution of corps members from different backgrounds to all the states of the federation. There is need for balanced deployment of corps members to key sectors in all states.

Conclusion

The NYSC since its formulation has been confronted with numerous challenges with some calling for the scrapping of the scheme. One of those contemporary challenges is the advent of corona virus in Nigeria, which like just other parts of the world, has been of adverse effect in almost every sphere of life in Nigeria. The NYSC was not left out as the virus had threatened the effectiveness of the scheme through the alteration of the established order of events. Regardless of these challenges however, the NYSC to some extent has been able to accomplish its laid down objectives and goals. It has succeeded in enhancing common ties among the Nigerian youths and has played a critical role in efforts towards national integration.

In this study, an attempt was made to interrogate the impact of Covid-19 on the NYSC scheme and draw up a blueprint for better ways to tackle some emerging challenges. First of all, the policy of the scheme should be reviewed to make it more relevant to contemporary and emerging challenges in the country by introducing more innovative programs. There is also need to continuously upgrade the capacity of corps members and make them more amenable to mobilization during critical national emergencies like the Covid-19 period and other health related interventions.

It will be necessary to enhance the capacity of corps members so as to harness their potentials in economic empowerment initiatives in the face of the economic recession facing the country. This coupled with, welfare priorities and adequate security for corps members will go a

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long way in retaining the continued relevance of the NYSC Scheme and ensure its sustainability.

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6

COVID-19 and the Mental Health of Corps Members

Usman Abubakar Lamido

Introduction

Historically, the last global pandemic was the 1918 pandemic. In December 2019, the corona virus disease- 2019 (COVID-19) a severe respiratory illness was discovered in Wuhan, China (WHO, 2020a). It subsequently spread to other parts of the world, and one month later, it was declared an international public health emergency by the World Health Organization.¹ Currently, over 4 million people are affected

¹ World Health Organization. (Rolling updates on coronavirus disease (COVID-19). 2020a, April 18. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>

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globally and nearly 300,000 people have died. Although this represents a small proportion of Nigeria's population of about 200 million, the progressively rising number of cases suggests that the peak of the pandemic is still yet to be reached. Just like any other country in the world, Nigeria had its own share of the negative impacts due to the corona virus. It has touched every sphere of the Nigerian society. One of the sectors which the corona virus had impacted was the NYSC scheme. As a result of the virus, the orientation camp had to be abruptly shut down as per taking precaution from the continuous spread of the virus. More so, the lockdown has been of negative impact to the mental health of corps members as some of them could not access their various Places of Primary Assignments; The social restrictions consequent to the lockdown may have worsened pre-existing financial difficulties for corps members especially considering Nigeria's high rate of poverty and unemployment. These and many more have proven to be detrimental to the mental health of corps members. Therefore, this study is a cursory attempt to investigate and interrogate how the advent of the corona virus and Government policies that came as an antecedent like the total lockdown of the country for some period affects the mental health of corps members.

Institutional and Public Responses

Probably drawing on lessons learned from the West African Ebola epidemic in 2014, the Federal Government of Nigeria and the NCDC respectively announced increased surveillance at the five international airports and plans to activate a corona virus incident system 1 month before the first case of COVID-19 was reported in February 2020. The index case, an expatriate who arrived in Lagos, Nigeria on business tested positive to the virus a day after his arrival.²

²Nigeria Centre for Disease Control Coronavirus (COVID-19) highlights.2020a, April, 24 <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/>

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Since then, the prevalence has progressively increased to 4,399 confirmed cases at the time of writing this commentary. Cases of COVID-19 have remained concentrated in Lagos—an epicentre of local and international commerce, and home to one of the busiest international airports in the country. Lagos has a high population density with high socioeconomic inequalities and the higher rates of COVID-19 infection in this state may reflect the combined impact of international travel and adverse socioeconomic conditions. For example, overcrowding and the high rate of homelessness in Lagos may make social distancing infeasible.³

About 3 weeks after the first case was reported, Nigeria placed a travel ban on flights from 13 countries with high prevalence rates of COVID-19. Nigerians who were abroad were requested to return and advised to self-isolate for 2 weeks. While many returned, the recommendation to self-isolate went largely unheeded and potentially increased the likelihood of spread.⁴ This may reflect a low perception of risk and the use of situationally unhelpful coping strategies. For example, many Nigerians initially believed the setiological virus could not survive in a tropical environment while others indicated that God's protection was enough to prevent and cure COVID-19. Perhaps in a bid to prioritize scarce resources, testing was reserved for people who were symptomatic and had a significant travel history with results taking 24–48 hrs to be processed. Other measures implemented to contain the spread of the virus included closure of international airports, public and private schools, universities, stores and markets, and suspension of

³Koiki, O. Lagos airport: Connecting passengers, airlines. Independent. 2018, June 19 <https://www.independent.ng/lagos-airport-connecting-passengers-airlines/>

⁴Onyeji, E. Nigeria: Coronavirus—Report returnees not observing self-isolation—Minister urges Nigerians. allAfrica.2020, March 27 <https://allafrica.com/stories/202003270756>.

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public gatherings in major cities.⁵ Personnel with experience in emergency response in epidemics, such as members of the polio emergency operations center, were engaged and trained by the Ministry of Health (WHO,2020c). Doctors, nurses, and other medical staff were trained and deployed to designated isolation centres (Lagos State Government, 2020).

The NCDC also publicized WHO-recommended public health measures including frequent hand washing; avoiding touching one's eyes, nose, and mouth; practicing respiratory hygiene; and social distancing (NCDC, 2020b). Similar to countries significantly affected by the pandemic, many Nigerian states instituted a lockdown whereby citizens were encouraged, and in some cases, mandated to work from home (Kehinde,2020) to limit the chances of contracting or spreading the virus while Government-run institutions and private businesses not providing essential services were closed. However, considering Nigeria's unfavorable socioeconomic indices (United Nations Development Programme Nigeria, 2019) and the negative economic impacts of the lockdown; it is unsurprising that the lockdown was eased after 5 weeks. During the lockdown, many households have received support from the Nigerian Government in partnership with private organizations. However, the poor state of existing infrastructure is a strong limitation on the efficient delivery of such support. For example, undrivable roads may mean that household and food supplies cannot be delivered to many regions (Bello, 2019). In reflection of these difficulties, there have been public demonstrations against the lockdown by people who cannot accommodate their needs while complying with the lockdown restrictions (Ewubare,2020; Ibekwe, 2020; Olayemi, 2020).

⁵Aluko, O. Coronavirus: FG orders closure of varsities, schools nationwide. The Punch Newspaper2020, 19 March<https://punchng.com/breaking-coronavirus-fg-orders-closure-of-varsities-schools-nationwide/>

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The NYSC Scheme.⁶

The objectives of the scheme are pursued through four cardinal programmes, namely: orientation course, primary assignment, community development service and winding-up/passing-out programmes. Through the implementation of the cardinal programmes, NYSC has been making profound impact on the socio-economic development of the country, especially in the areas of Education, Healthcare, Agriculture and Infrastructural Development amongst others.⁷

Right from its inception, the NYSC scheme has contributed immensely in its own way to growth and development through meeting the needs at the grassroots, state and national levels. It has served as a source of manpower for the various sectors of the nation such as educational and health sectors. It has provided seasonal jobs for entrepreneurs and has also harnessed the skills of its corps members in rural communities where their presence has been evident in terms of community projects thereby sustaining development as a complement to government activities.

The present-day NYSC has furthermore continued to play its role as a potent force in confronting the myriads of challenges attendant on a nation in its transitional strides towards modernity and socio-economic advancement. The scheme has remained a rallying point in the analysis of the impacts of youth-based organizations in the development of a nation both as a vibrant labour force and a centripetal force in the promotion of national unity.⁸

⁶ Brig Gen S Ibrahim, Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18th NYSC Director-General, (compiled by the Special Duties Department, NYSC National Directorate Headquarters) May 2020.

⁷ Brig Gen S Ibrahim, Selected Speeches and Strides, viii.

⁸ OGUN KOPA: 2019 Batch B End of Service Year Magazine, A Publication of NYSC Ogun State, May 2020

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Ironically, the scheme having existed for almost 48 years has undergone lots of restructuring in the face of a plethora of challenges that has bedeviled it. Evident among such challenges is the increasing spate of insecurity, digital revolution and changing dynamics of the nation. In recent times, the scheme is faced with the challenges posed by the sudden outbreak of the novel Covid-19 pandemic which affected its operations and caused some adjustments in its programmes.

The NYSC Scheme and Its Continuous Evolving Strategy for Survival in Covid-19

The NYSC has made an enormous impact in almost every sphere of life in Nigeria, from economic, social, political and many more. It has grown to be an integral part of the country. It is seen as one of the major tools for national integration in the face of the divergent interests and multiethnic nature of the country. However, regardless of how significant NYSC is to the unity and peace of Nigeria, it is still plagued with numerous challenges. Despite these daunting challenges, the scheme has continued to grow and evolve new ways of tackling them. Some of the earliest challenges it was threatened with includes; inadequate manpower, inadequate funding, lack of adequate intervention on statutory matters by the states, complacency among some corps members thereby leading to truancy, general discontent caused by unpatriotic disposition of some parents and corps members.⁹ It had been argued that some of the aforementioned trials and teething troubles are believed to have risen out of the initial hurried birth and hasty implementation of the scheme; others have been caused by political developments wholly extraneous to the scheme; while some are the inevitable result of the economic recession and the consequent review of budgetary priorities.¹⁰ Unfortunately

⁹Gregory Enegwea and Gabriel Umoden, “NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service”, (Lagos: Gabumo Publishing Company Limited, 1993) 182.

¹⁰ Gregory Enegwea and Gabriel Umoden, “NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service”.

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while still grappling with these issues, the nation was plunged into several devastating terrorist attacks by the Boko Haram terrorist, kidnapping and hostage taking, political and ethno-religious violence and threats to lives within some given geographical entity of the nation became the order of the day.¹¹

Furthermore, the death of some corps members in the 2011 post-election violence in the north as well as the serial bombings in some parts of the north became an impediment to the relevance of the scheme. Subsequently, there was mass relocation of corps members who were posted to volatile states. While the corps members were fighting for their survival and protection, the leadership of the scheme was grappling with the issues of equitable distribution of corps members across the country. These heightened wind of insecurity therefore posed as a major threat to the continuous existence of the scheme and its ability to achieve the national unity which was a dire need in the country at that time.¹²

In an attempt to redeem and revive the schemes, several programmes were set in motion such as the establishment of distress call centre, martial art and the introduction of the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme in March 2012.¹³ The aim of this strategy was to tackle the issue of unemployment in the country by incorporating skills required to be self-employed in the face of unfavorable economic conditions. Although, there have been arguments that SAED emphasizes more on short term benefits, low skill

¹¹Aremu Fatai Ayinde, "National Youth Service Corps Programme and the Quest for National Integration: Issues for Policy Consideration", Journal of Management and Social Sciences, 2018, 279-296.

¹²Caleb Ayansina, "NYSC ,a new DG and the challenge of 2014", www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2014/02/nysc-new-dg-challenges-2014/amp/ Accessed February 17th 2021. See also, Aremu Fatai Ayinde, "National Youth Service Corps Programme, 287.

¹³ Caleb Ayansina, NYSC, a new DG and the challenges of 2014, See also, www.nysc.gov.ng/saedconnect.html

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and labor intensive which puts the Nigerian youths at disadvantage in comparison with their counterpart from other nations who focus more and prosecute real human capital development strategies, transfer of technology and acquiring strategic skills for global competitiveness.¹⁴ The challenges militating against the success of the SAED programme in its fullness includes; inadequate entrepreneurial and financial literacy amongst the SAED trainers, redeployment in relation to the SAED program and insufficient place of primary assignment.¹⁵

The destructions caused by suspected Boko Haram members in places like Yobe and Borno States led to the moving of the camp exercise to Keffi in Nassarawa, Benue and Gombe state from 2011. The prevalent insecurity in seven northern states with high occurrence of Boko Haram terrorist attacks in 2014 led to the re-deployment of corps members from those states. These included Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano and Yobe states.¹⁶

Furthermore, population increase in the country over the years rubbed off on the NYSC scheme and in turn leading to an increase in academic institutions as well increase in the number of graduates on a yearly basis. The scheme adopted the strategy of subdivision of batches into streams in 2014 starting with the Batch B.¹⁷ Although it is assumed to be a response to the increasing number of graduates being produced

¹⁴Owigwe Eguegu, "Why NYSC's SAED Programme is a Huge Threat to the Future of Nigeria", <https://venturesafrica.com/nysc-why-saed-is-a-huge-threat-to-the-future-of-nigeria/>

¹⁵Beyond Nysc, (Cognity Advisory: Building partnership to co-create solutions for Africa's development challenges) www.youtheconomicopportunities.org

¹⁶Samson Kukogho, "7 Boko Haram Infested States Lose out as NYSC Redeploys Corps Members", www.pulse.ng/communities/student/escaping-boko-haram-7-boko-haram-infested-states-lose-out-as-nysc-redeploys-corps/6pg3c28.amp Accessed February 18 2021.

¹⁷Dayo Adesulu, "NYSC introduces two streams for corps members", www.vanguardngr.com/2014/08/nysc-introduces-two-streams-for-corps-members/amp/ See also www.nysc.gov.ng.

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every year by tertiary institutions and the lack of adequate space to accommodate them all at once. A closer look at the period of this subdivision suggests that this strategy also helped in terms of security of corps members because the country was at the height of incessant Boko Haram attacks with some of the orientation camps not fully secured for corps members. It was therefore a necessary step to take in an effort to accommodate the re-deployed corps members from volatile states into other states with the exemption of the states earlier mentioned.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and NYSC's Response

In response to the directive to adhere to preventive and safety protocols, the NYSC shut down its orientation camps nationwide on the 18th of March, 2020 thereby disrupting the orientation course of the 2020 Batch-A Stream-1 corps members only a week into the exercise and posted them to their various places of primary assignment. As part of the necessary steps in curtailing the spread of the virus, isolation centres were opened in various parts of the country. Commendable was the swift compliance of the NYSC scheme to the presidential directive to release its orientation camp facilities nationwide to serve as isolation centres and its immediate arrangement for the provision of relevant facilities to enhance effective usage of the camps were made.¹⁸ Furthermore, the scheme engaging its corps members joined in the fight against covid-19 as corps medical teams of doctors, nurses and laboratory scientists across the federation joined their counterparts and other health professionals in the frontline, providing services in various health facilities and working with some NGO's to test patients.¹⁹ Other corps members made impact through the SAED program by the mass production and donation of face masks, antiseptic liquid soaps

¹⁸ Covid-19:NYSC Corps Members Sustain Campaigns against the Pandemic,
<https://prnigeria.com/2020/04/07/covid-nysc-corps-sustain-campaigns>

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and hand sanitizers. They equally fabricated and donated automatic and foot-operated water, liquid soaps and hand sanitizers dispensers as well as disinfection as well as disinfection chambers in several states for their fellow corps members, state government and their host communities.²⁰

Another important role of the scheme was visible through corps members who organized sensitization campaigns through radio, television and other social media outlets. They became vanguards promoting strict adherence to the Covid-19 rules and protocols. Besides, most of the central activities for serving corps members such as the monthly signing of clearance, weekly and monthly Community Development Service (CDS) were suspended; and also passing out parade (POP) reduced to final clearance as a result of the pandemic and lockdown. The NYSC orientation exercise was also suspended to prevent the risk of transmission of the disease through inter-state travels.²¹

With the resumption of camp activities in late 2020 after the lock down had been eased, there have been visible effects of Covid-19 on the scheme and its programs. The gradual easing of the lockdown and the resumption of socio-economic, educational and political activities led the NYSC to reopen their orientation camps for its corps members and the NYSC community. Working in conjunction with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the NYSC put in place certain measures to prevent infections and early identification of outbreaks in the various orientation camps across the federation. Such measures included the fumigation of orientation camps nation-wide to ensure environmental hygiene, the use of rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) approved by WHO to screen its members, a National Guideline detailing the camp activities

²¹ Oral interview with Agoro Omotayo Ebunoluwa, Ex-corp member in Akwa-Ibom State, February 17, 2021.

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was developed to keep prospective corps members informed on vital measures to help in reducing the risk of infection amongst many others.²²

With the above measures set in place, the NYSC with approval from the federal government went further in November to mobilize 66,000 prospective corps members to camps in different parts of the state amidst rising fears of the spread of the virus, although, the Director General assured Nigerians that the scheme has put in place essential measures endorsed by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in all orientation Camps in-line with the protocols for the safety of corps members.²³ Sources confirmed that the NYSC as an organization and a vast community responsible for hosting large number of persons yearly took measures to ensure its activities are carried out successfully in the face of Covid-19 by ensuring medical scrutiny of its corps members and staffs at its orientation camps, isolating and reporting of all suspected case, general adherence to the Covid-19 protocols within and outside camps.²⁴

Evidently, the NYSC as a critical stakeholder in Nigeria, the proactive steps adopted by the scheme in response to the contemporary global health challenge posed by Covid-19 will remain a worthwhile agenda in the archives as it has secured its place in the annals of the nation's developmental history.

²² Covid-19: Safe Re-opening of NYSC Orientation Camp in Nigeria,
<https://ncdc.gov.ng/reports/282/2020-october-week-43> Accessed 24 February 2021.

²³ Luminous Jannamike, "NYSC Deploys 66,000 Corps Members for Orientation Exercise Tuesday",
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Mental Health Consequences of COVID-19 on Corps Members

Studies by researchers, had shown that there would be an increase in the mental health of the populations as a direct consequences of the corona virus. For instance ,summations in a study by Roy et al; ²⁵shows evidence that the mental health needs of the population would definitely increase in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and also the post-lockdown. However, while there are ongoing surveys about the mental health needs of Nigerians during the pandemic for example the study by Asido Foundation,²⁶ there are no published data on the state of mental health in Nigeria. Nevertheless, we expect that stressors specific to this period may exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions or trigger new cases. These stressors include the social restrictions consequent to the lockdown which may worsen pre-existing financial difficulties for corps members especially considering Nigeria's high rates of poverty and unemployment.²⁷ Although the corps members still get paid from the Federal Government as they were home due to the compulsory lockdown and restriction of NYSC activities, it affects them financially also as some corps members aside from the stipends given them by the Federal Government, they also get incentives from their Place of Primary Assignment,. More so, some corps members are into entrepreneurship businesses which in turn fetches them extra money. Although a population- based survey indicated good knowledge about COVID-19 among Nigerians,²⁸ they

²⁵Roy, D., Tripathy, S., Kar, S. K., Sharma, N., Verma, S. K., & Kaushal, V. (2020). Study of knowledge, attitude, anxiety & perceived mental healthcare need in Indian population during COVID-19 pandemic. Asian Journal of Psychiatry, 51.

²⁶Asido Foundation. (2020, May, 06). Emotional and psychosocial responses to the corona virus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Nigeria: Findings from a national online survey. Retrieved from <https://docs.google.com/>

²⁷ World Poverty Clock. (2020, April 22). Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://www.worldpoverty.io/index.html>

²⁸Olaapegba, P. O., Ayandele, O., Kolawole, S. O., Oguntayo, R., Gandhi, J. C., Dangiwa, A. L., & Ottu, I. F. A. (2020). COVID-19 knowledge and perceptions in Nigeria. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.31234/osf>

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may still be prone to adverse impacts of misinformation especially those working in the health sector.

Medical Doctors, Pharmacists, Lab Scientists, and Nurses, who operate programme called “Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers” (HIRD)²⁹, They were actively providing mental and physical health information at a critical period when spreading wrong data can result in wrong health choices.³⁰ The negative impacts of social isolation consequent on the lockdown may also be higher in Nigeria considering the collectivist culture.³¹ The isolation may also reduce Corps members' access to social and religious support which are recognized coping strategies among Nigerians.³²

The unstable Internet facilities in Nigeria also mean that online interactions may be insufficient to reduce these deficits, especially for corps members found in rural settings where knowledge, affordability, and availability of information technology is limited. Essential health care, including mental health services, are still being provided as recommended by the WHO. However, considering that many institutions providing mental health services sometimes have a geographical coverage including several states which may span hundreds of kilometers (e.g., Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals Complex, 2020), corps members with emergency mental

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²⁹ NYSC, “National Youth Service Corps Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers - Profile”, www.nysc.gov.ng, Retrieved February 23/02/2021.

³⁰ Salo, J. Nigeria reports poisonings from possible coronavirus drug chloroquine. New York Post. 2020, March 22.

[https://www.google.com/amp/s/nypost.com/2020/03/22/nigeria-reports-poisonings- from-possible-coronavirus-drug-chloroquine/amp/](https://www.google.com/amp/s/nypost.com/2020/03/22/nigeria-reports-poisonings-from-possible-coronavirus-drug-chloroquine/amp/)

³¹ Vincent, B. D., & Igusisi, O. VYoruba culture and leadership style in Nigerian organization. Oradea Journal of Business and Economics, 3, (2018): 33–42.

³² Osundina, A. F., Fatoye, F. O., Akanni, O. O., Omoreagba, J. O., Akin-sulore, A., & Oloniniyi, I. O. Burden and coping styles among caregivers of patients with major mental disorders and hypertension attending a Nigerian tertiary hospital. Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry, 33, (2017): 189–195.

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health needs may be unable to access such care. Reports of limited supplies of personal protective equipment in hospitals and mortality from COVID-19 among health care workers³³ may further limit access of mental health care services by corps members. Similarly, while tele-consultations are being promoted; the inadequate Internet services may limit the utility of this means of delivering health care (Onaleye, 2020). However, on a positive note, the daily updates being provided by the NCDC and the Nigerian minister for health may limit the adverse effects of misinformation it has on corps members especially those in the frontline in fighting the virus.

Conclusion

The response of the Nigerian government to the COVID-19 outbreak has been relatively prompt; however, the effectiveness of the social interventions may be undermined by the inadequacy of pre-existing social infrastructure while the mental health consequences of the outbreak on corps members remain largely unrecognized. It is important that all stakeholders in the Nigerian health industry begin to make preparations to limit the adverse mental health impacts of the pandemic on citizens especially corps members who are full of youthful exuberance and multiple life choices.. Data collection and documentation of mental health needs during these times is a critical first step towards informed policy. In view of this, a broad based posttraumatic counselling framework has to be worked out to mitigate against adverse mental health consequences on confirmed cases. It could be adduced that the Covid-19 pandemic brings to the importance of adequate social infrastructure and significantly highlights the need for inter sectoral collaborations towards minimizing the likely mental health consequences on victims especially corps members.

³³ Obinna, C. COVID-19: NMA appeals to Nigerians to save lives of health workers. Vanguard. (2020, April 24) <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2020/04/covid-19-nma-appeals-to-nigerians-to-save-lives-of-health-workers/amp/>

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7

COVID-19 and Government Response to the Challenges of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

Rufai Aliyu

Introduction

Historically, communicable diseases have been the cause of so many deaths worldwide. The emergence of the corona virus disease has caused havoc to humanity. A respiratory disease caused by acute respiratory syndrome corona virus-2 believed to be a new strain of SARS-CoV virus of 2002.¹ The virus was named COVID-19 by the world

¹ Sohrabi, C.A.Isafi, Z., O'Neill, N., Khan, M., Kerwan, A., Al-Jabir, A., Iosifidis, C. (2020), "World Health Organization Declares Global Pandemic: A Review of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Int. J. Surg., 76, pp. 71-76.

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Health Organization (WHO) on 29 December, 2019. The outbreak was declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020 by WHO having met the epidemiological criteria of <100,000 confirmed cases in at least 100 countries.² The outbreak was first reported in Wuhan, Hubei province of China and spread to over 210 countries.³ The COVID-19 virus is not airborne but can be transmitted by air through droplet from infected person or when a person comes in contact with contaminated surfaces.⁴

The symptoms associated with the disease are similar to that of cold. They include fever, cough, shortness of breath and loss of smell. However studies have shown that complications such as kidney failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome, viral sepsis and pneumonia can develop over time based on the patient's medical condition⁵.

There are 114,773,365 confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide on 28 February, 2021, with countries like United State of America, India, Brazil and Russia having the highest fatality rate, with Africa having the least fatality rate.

On 23 January, 2020 the index case of COVID-19 in the United States of America was reported⁶. The virus has since spread to all parts of the country with 29,257,069 confirmed cases of which 9,036,947 active cases, 19,694324 recovered, 525,780 deaths have been recorded as at 28 February, 2021⁷. Similarly, in Brazil, the index case of COVID-19 was

² Callaway, E. "Time to use the P-word? Coronavirus Enter Dangerous New Phase." *Nature*, 2020, pp. 579

³ World Health Organization. "China Joint Mission on Corona Virus Disease, 2019 (COVID-19)". March 2, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/who-china-joint-mission-oncovid-19-finalreport.pdf>.

⁴ Oluwaseun, Oyeranti and Babajide Sokeye, "The Evolution and Spread f COVID-19 in Nigeria." *CPEEL's*, Vol II Discussion Papres series, pp. 1-18.

⁵ Sohrabi, WHO Declares Global Pandemic

⁶Worldometer. sv "Coronavirus Live Update". February, 2020 Retrieved from: <https://worldometers.info/coronavirus#countries>

⁷ Worldometer, *Coronavirus*

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reported on 26 February, 2020, in Sao Paulo, making it the first South American country to report the case of COVID-19⁸. Despite the government effort to contain the spread of the virus, the country continues to report an upward trend in the transmission of the Virus. On 24 February, 2021 the country has recorded a total of 10,551,259 confirmed cases which includes 885,208 active cases, 255,018 deaths and 9,411,033 recovered.⁹

The African continent has been reported to be the last continent to be hit by COVID-19, which suggest lower survival rates of the pathogens in tropical Africa¹⁰. The index case of COVID-19 was reported in Egypt on 14th February, 2020, since then COVID-19 has spread to all part of the continent¹¹. On 28 February, 2021 countries like South Africa (1,513,393 confirmed cases and 49,993 deaths) and Morocco (483,654 confirmed cases and 8623 deaths) have been reported to have the highest number of confirmed cases in Africa. In West Africa, Nigeria a country with a population of over 200,000,000 people has been reported to be the country most hit by the Pandemic.

COVID-19 Pandemic and its Spread in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Lagos on 27 February, 2020. The index case was a 44 year old Italian citizen believed to have returned from Milan, Italy on 24, February, 2020 and

⁸Burki, T. "COVID-19 in Latin America, The Lancet" Issue 5 vol 1, pp. 547-547.
doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1473-3099\(20\)30303-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1473-3099(20)30303-0) May 01

⁹ Worldometer, Coronavirus Live update

¹⁰ Chinenyenwa Ohia, Adeleye S. Bakare, Tauseef Ahmad. 2020, "COVID-19 and Nigeria: Putting the Realities in context" *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 95, pp 279-281

¹¹WHO. 2020." COVID-19 Cases Top 10,000 in Africa." April 18, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://afro.who.int/news/covid-19-cases-top-10-000-africa> [Google Scholar]

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was presented at the health facility on 26 February, 2020.¹² Following these confirmation, 216 persons were identified to have made contact with the infected patient. Out of which 45 persons had travelled out of Nigeria while 175 persons tested positive to the COVID-19 virus.¹³

The National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), Nigeria's highest public health emergency response unit, observed that within the first 30 days of detection of the index case, 70 percent of patients who tested positive to the virus were male, while 30 percent were female. Patients between ages of 31-50 years were most affected. Study has shown that while 44 percent of the initial cases were imported, 41 percent of the newly infected patients had no travel history and were also believed to have no prior contact with an infected person. This suggests a high level community transmission of the virus.¹⁴

To prevent community transmission of COVID-19 in Nigeria, states like Lagos, Ogun and FCT implemented a lockdown and stay- at home directives effective from March 30, 2020, consequently leading to restrictions of inter-state movement throughout the country¹⁵. The primary aim is to flatten the COVID-19 curve through reduction in confirmed cases and ensuring infected persons recover quickly. At this period people are expected to stay indoors, therefore contact locations such as religious houses, schools, recreational centers, hotels, universities and clubs were closed down. A total lockdown was later

¹² NCDC. "First case of Coronavirus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria" March 11, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/227/first-case-of-corona-virus-disease-confirmed-in-nigeria> [Google Scholar]

¹³ NCDC. "First case of Coronavirus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria"

¹⁴ Jimoh Amzata, Kafayat Aminu, Victor i. Kolo, Ayedele A. Akinyele, Janet A. Agundairo, Maryann C. Danjibo. 2020, "Coronavirus Outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and Socio-medical Response During the First 100 Days," *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 98; pp 1-7.

¹⁵ Muanya, C., Olaiya, T., Afolabi, A., "Fear of COVID-19 Cases Rise Amid Relaxed Lockdowns," Guardian news, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://guardian.ng/news/fear-as-covid-19-cases-rise-amid-relaxed-lockdowns/>

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replaced by a relaxed lockdown with curfew from 8 pm to 6 am effective from May 4, 2020, while the inter-state travel ban was still enforced. In these lockdown health workers, security personnel and movement of essential commodities were exempted.

The total lockdown was replaced by the relaxed lockdown with the believe that citizens will adhere to COVID-19 safety protocols. However, the country experienced a 52 percent increase in all COVID-19 confirmed cases, consequently a 20 days total lockdown effective from June 7, 2020 was implemented (NCDC, 2020).¹⁶ UNDP (2020) reported that Nigeria's population works mostly in the informal sector that required person to person interaction for cash transaction and patronage, thus millions of Nigerians will be pushed into lockdown induced poverty, temporal and permanent unemployment and in some cases hunger-virus. These could also lead to an increase in other social problems like, kidnapping, gender base violence amongst others. Due to the adverse effect of the lockdown on the citizens a gradual reopening of the economy was mandatory, which led to a phase gradual easing of the lock down. The unbearable economic conditions caused by the lockdown prompted governments to announce phase of gradual easing of the lockdown, however many countries including Nigeria adhered to WHO guideline for countries that wants to partially reopen its economical activities.

The guidelines are as follows; Total assurance that the transmission is under control for both individual and community transmission should be ensured; Adequate health capacity well equipped to detect, test, isolate and treat every reported case and also contact tracing should be ensured; Major health facility centers and nursing homes should be capable of minimizing the pandemic; Plans and implementation should be in place to prevent infection transmission in workplaces, schools,

¹⁶ NCDC. "COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria," 2020. Retrieved from:
<https://ncdc.gov.ng/diseases/sitreps>.

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houses of worship and other essential places; Plans to ensure risk of COVID-19 importation are well monitored; Aggressive education, engagement and empowerment in the light of new norms should be taken as priority.¹⁷

The first phase of the gradual ease of the lockdown was announced on April 27, 2020, which saw the lockdown relaxed from May 4 to 17, 2020 with a curfew of 8 pm to 6 am in Lagos State, Ogun State and FCT. There was an extension of this phase effective from May 18, to June 1, 2020. The second phase commenced on June 2 to June 29, 2020 with further measures detailed in the second phase as follows¹⁸: with exception of Journalist and health workers, the curfew will be modified from 8 pm –6 am to 10 pm –4 am daily, Banks to resume normal operations, Government office to resume from 9:00am – 2:00pm from Mondays to Fridays; While inter-state movement still remain enforced, essential commodities like agricultural produce; manufactured goods and petroleum product are exempted; Air travels still remain banned with exception of emergency flights; Kano state to begin phase one of ease lock down; Wearing of face mask remains mandatory in public places; Hand washing/sanitizing practices are required for individuals and organizations; Gathering of above 20 persons is prohibited; Religious places to resume under the supervision of PTF and state government.¹⁹

On June 30, 2020, the phase three easing of the lockdown was announced following the approval of the 5th interim report of the PTF on COVID-19 by President Mohamadu Buhari, President Federal

¹⁷ Dr. Trdros Ahhanom Ghebreyesus. "Address of Dr. Trdros Ahhanom Ghebreyesus at WHO Media Briefing on COVID-19" March 11, 2020.

¹⁸ Omilana T., 2020. "Buhari Extends Phase Two of COVID-19 Lock down by Four Weeks" Guardian, June 29, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://guardian.ng/buhari-extends-phase-two-of-covid-19-lockdown/>

¹⁹ Ibrahim, R.L., Bello, K., Ajide, O., and Olatunde, J. 2020, "Health Policy and Technology, 9, pp 399-404

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Republic of Nigeria. With this phase expected to last for four weeks, few modalities were made in phase two easing which includes; close monitoring the reopening of airports and local flights; School resumptions for secondary school students in graduating class and lifting of inter-state travel ban. However, the 10pm - 4am national curfew became mandatory and punishable by law.²⁰

Despite the gradual easing of the lock down, each phase persistently recorded a spike in the COVID-19 curve. Ibrahim et al, (2020), in their study pointed out that phase one (April 27- May 4, 2020) there were 8673 confirmed additional COVID-19 cases within the 35 days, which exceeded that total case during the per and lockdown period which was 1183 confirmed cases. Similarly, Phase two experienced 7490 confirmed cases additionally, while phase three witnessed an additional 9049 confirmed cases which suggest an escalating trend of high margin as FGN continues to ease the lockdown. He opined that In Nigeria, WHO guidelines for easing lockdown were not fully implemented which consequently led to increase in the number of confirmed cases nationwide.²¹

Government Preparedness and Response to COVID-19 in Nigeria

Nigeria had been identified as the thirteen top country in Africa with the high risk of importation of the virus owing to the strong link with China. However the World Health Organization (WHO) prior before the outbreak in Africa, had advised countries to develop capacity for early detection of the virus in other not to overwhelm their health system.

Prior to the importation of this virus into Nigeria, the FGN through the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) began a COVID-19 preparedness and response strategy to strengthen its surveillance at

²⁰ Omilana, *Buhari Extends Phase Two of COVID-19 Lock down by Four Weeks*.

²¹ Ibrahim, *Health Policy and Technology*

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the point of entry basically the airports.²² Although measure has been taken by the government to strengthen its surveillance at the airports since January, 2020, Nigeria still recorded its index case imported from Italy whom had visited other states within the country before showing symptoms of COVID-19. This indicates the pre-COVID-19 preparedness was inadequate. On detection of the index case, a multi-sectoral NCDC led-Emergency Operation Centers (EOC) was step-up in 22 of 36 states of the federation, to supervise the response to COVID-19 nationally. There were rapid response teams deployed by NCDC to ensure contact tracing in States like Lagos, Ogun and FCT which were the epicenter of the outbreak.²³

Subsequently, on 9 March, 2020 a Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 was inaugurated. The Team lead by the Secretary of the Federal Government Boss Mustapha announced the banning of all travelers from the 13 COVID-19 high risk countries,²⁴ unfortunately the country had already recorded more imported cases of COVID-19. Experts from Nigeria were among those trained from February 6th to 8th 2020, by the African Centre for Disease Control (Africa CDC), on COVID-19 diagnosis using Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)²⁵. Therefore, the PCR was used for the COVID-19 test prior to the approval of Antigen (Ag) based Rapid Diagnostic Test by the NCDC.

On September 2020, WHO announced the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) of two Ag RDTs. A validation exercise of the RDT was carried out

²²NCDC. "COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria," 2020. Retrieved from: <https://ncdc.gov.ng/diseases/sitreps>

²³ Jimoh, A, Kafayat, A, Victor, I.K., Ayodele, A. A Janet, A.O., and Maryann, C.D. 2020. "Coronavirus Outbreak in Nigeria; Burden and Socio-medical Response During the First 100 Days," *International Journal of Infectious Disease*, Vol 98, pp. 218-224

²⁴ Jimoh, Coronavirous Outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and Socio-medical Response During the First 100 Days.

²⁵ Africa CDC. "Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Global Epidemic," February 11, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://africaCDC.org/disease-outbreak/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-global-epidemic-11-february-2020/>

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by NCDC in synergy with other relevant stakeholder in Nigeria²⁶. The validation was held at NYSC camp with showed that RDT attain the minimal standard for sensitivity and specificity of COVID-19 diagnostic test, thus it was recommend for use primarily in places like schools and hospitals for testing patients with COVID-19 symptoms. RDT proved to be faster and save effective when compared to PCR method, however Nigeria does not have adequate testing facilities to test its huge populace for COVID-19.²⁷

In addition to the COVID-19 preparedness strategy, the polio infrastructure a programme designed to eradicate polio in Nigeria was adopted. The structure brought on board its technical expertise, logical capacity, human resources, community network and disease surveillance experience to help combat the spread of the COVID-19²⁸. The polio infrastructure was brought on board due to the significant role it played in combating the EVD outbreak. The EOCs coordinating the outbreak response in each state are modeled under six functional units namely: Point of entry, epidemiology and surveillance, risk communication, management and communication, case management, and laboratory services.

Drawing lessoning from the Ebola Virus Pandemic, the NCDC strengthened their human resources and equipped the National Reference Laboratory with Personal Protection Equipments (PPEs) and

²⁶ NCDC. "NCDC Publish New Guideline on Use of Approved Rapid Diagnostic Test Kit In Congregate Settings." NCDC, January, 18 2021.

<https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/286/ncdc-publishes-new-guidance-on-use-of-approved-rapid-diagnostic-test-kits-in-congregate-settings>

²⁷ Madubuike, U.A., Ishmael, J.F Obichukwu, C.N., Chinwe-Juliana, I.J., and JamesWabwire, O. 2020, "A Perspective on Nigeria's Preparedness, Response and Challenges to Mitigating the Spread of COVID-19" *Challenges*, pp. 1-15; DOI:10.3390/challe11020022.

²⁸ WHO. "Nigeria's Polio Infrastructure Bolster COVID-19 Response", May 8, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.afro.who.int/news/nigerias-polioinfrastructure-bolster-covid-19-response>

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diagnostic equipments required for testing for the epidemic-prone pathogens²⁹. A commendable effort by the NCDC was setting up a laboratory diagnostic test for SAR-CoV-2 within 48 hours of isolating the index case of COVID-19.³⁰ However, it was still limited to symptomatic cases. NCDC in a bid to intensify its effort in responding to the outbreak, there was a change in their testing strategies which lead to the establishment of 112 public and private testing laboratories across all states and FCT. In addition 74 of these are public laboratories that provide free COVID-19 testing to the general public³¹, however a country with a population of >200,000,000 people, only 1,544,008 sample was tested as at March 3, 2021³². Despite government's effort to control the spread of the virus, on March 3, 2021 the country has so far recorded 156,496 confirmed cases with 135,136 discharged cases, 19,437 active cases and 1,923 deaths.³³

Center for Policy Impact in Global Health, (2020) averred that evidence based policies such as 'Test and trace' and physical distancing have been implemented at the federal and state levels, However, implementation has happened on a weak health systems, slow emergency response and less optimal data/information monitoring system which led to implementation gap. Similarly, Ibekwe, (2020) opined that although there was an increase in the number of isolation facilities and intensive care units (ICU), there was grossly inadequate health care facilities and equipments (including ventilators and PPE) to handle COVID-19 emergencies.

Ajisegiri et al., 2020 opined that while government works towards strengthening the health system in response to COVID-

²⁹ WHO, Nigeria's polio Infrastructure Bolster.

³⁰ NCDC. "First case of Coronavirus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria.

³¹ NCDC, Publish New Guideline on use of Approved Rapid Diagnostic Test Kit.

³² Madubuike, A Perspective on Nigeria's Preparedness, Response and Challenges to Mitigating the Spread of COVID-19.

³³ Worldometer. "*Coronavirus Live Update*

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19 pandemic, there is a need to engage community health workers (CHWs) to enhance and promote a resilient health system, which is achievable through review in their curriculum especially now that task sharing and task shifting are being applied as strategy in the health system. This effort will enhance the Primary Health Care making it a reliable healthcare system for major infectious diseases.³⁴

Chinenyenwa et al., (2020) opined that there is a need for Nigeria to significantly improve on its health surveillance system to help in preventing the importation of deadly virus. He added that detection and diagnostics will be better if the time lag between the test and diagnostics could be reduced so as to encourage more people to test and contain the spread.³⁵

Oyeranti and Sokey (2020), in their study “the Evolution and Spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria” the study averred that there is a need for Nigerian government to strengthen its disease preventive measures and also enhance the laboratory testing ability across the country, in a bid to encourage quick and early detection of new COVID-19 positive cases for effective containment of the virus while administering of appropriate vaccine is ongoing.³⁶

NYSC and the Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is a scheme established by Decree 24, May 22, 1973 by the General Yakubu Gowon led administration. It was later replaced by Decree 51 of June 16th, 1993,

³⁴ Ajisengiri W.S., Odusanya, O.O., and Joshi, R. 2020, “COVID-19 Outbreak Situation in Nigeria and the Need for Effective Engagement of Community Health Workers for Epidemic Response”, *Global Biosecurity*, 1(4).

³⁵ Chinenyenwa, Adeleye, and Tauseef, COVID-19 and Nigeria: Putting the Realities in context.

³⁶ Oluwaseun and Babajide, The Evolution and Spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

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referenced as NYSC Act CAP N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria³⁷. The primary aim of establishment of this scheme was to encourage integration and promote national unity in post Nigerian Civil war between 1967-1970. The programme designed to instil in the Nigeria youths key objectives which includes; To inculcate discipline in Nigerian Youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves; To raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youth by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideas of national achievement, social and cultural improvement; To develop in Nigeria youth the attitude of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest; To enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment; To contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy; To develop common ties among the Nigeria youths and promote national unity and integration; To remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups³⁸. This is achieved through the mobilization, orientation and deployment of Degree and HND graduates between the ages of 18 – 30 years, known as Corps Members for a one year national service.

The impact of COVID-19 on NYSC took effect during the 2020 Batch A orientation camp. Half way into the orientation camp activities, the authorities of the NYSC were notified for an immediate closure of the camp as a COVID-19 prevention protocol to prevent further transmission of the virus. This led to the immediate deployment of Corps members to Places of Primary Assignment (PPA) whom haven't completed their 3 week orientation exercise. These Corps members

³⁷ NYSC Yearbook, "Historical Background of the Scheme", 45 ANNIVERSARY, 2020,
pp 19

³⁸ NYSC Yearbook, 2020, pp 16

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were instructed to observe the COVID-19 prevention protocol as published by the NCDC.

In an interview with the Kaduna NYSC State coordinator, Mallam Isa Wana, he averred that COVID-19 pandemic was quite unprecedented pointing out that even during the Ebola pandemic the measures taken by the FGN weren't as stringent as those taken during this COVID-19 pandemic. He stated that during the lockdown, corps members were not in their PPAs thus the scheme was left in limbo³⁹. He added that there was a split in 2020 Batch A Prospective Corps Members (PCM) into stream I and II respectively. However, the NYSC couldn't mobilize stream II, leaving the scheme with a backlog of Prospective Corps members awaiting mobilization. He pointed out that not only was the activities of the NYSC affected, it also affected all beneficiaries of the scheme. NYSC scheme serves as the gap between graduation and the real labour market, pointing out that when students graduate from the university, they are not just exposed to the labour market to start looking for jobs, rather they are mobilized by the NYSC to instil in them some sense of discipline and reality to make them distinguish between theories and practice for a period of one year. However, the PCMs were denied the possibility to understand how things work in reality for a period of one year. Similarly, operators of the scheme were also affected because they were doing less only essential services particularly in the area of supervision of medical Corps members on the frontline in the fight against COVID-19. But outside that, they weren't doing their normal jobs of posting Corps members and inspecting them.

He further averred that; the impact of COVID-19 on NYSC also affected the economy. Adding that the multiplying effect of Corps members became limited because prior to COVID-19 pandemic, the NYSC

³⁹ Isa Wana (Kaduna NYSC State Coordinator). Jibunor Victor, Kaduna State NYSC Seratariete, March 1, 2021

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orientation camps can accommodate about 2000 Corps members. However, in order to comply with the NCDC COVID-19 guidelines of social distancing, the camps were made to accommodate not more than 1000 Corps members. Consequently, schools are complaining about insufficient teachers, Chambers are lamenting lack of more staffs, and private sector is complaining of lack of work force to operate; these has led Government and Private sector to continually put in request for Corp members, which is an indication of the significance of Corps members to all the socio-economic aspects of Nigeria.⁴⁰

NYSC activities during COVID-19

Sequel to the Presidential directive of a national lockdown, the activities of the scheme such as orientation camps, CDS amongst others were put on hold. However, despite the lockdown, there was a mass mobilization of resources by the scheme to contribute to the fight against COVID-19. For instance, during the closure of Batch A 2020 orientation camps nationwide, medical Corp personnel which includes Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacist and Medical Laboratory Scientist were asked to stay behind. These medical Corp personnel were integrated into the State COVID-19 prevention response team in every state across the federation.

In an interview with the Kaduna State NYSC coordinator, Mallam Isa Wana, he averred that Corp members of the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development were saddled with the task of producing 10,000 face masks⁴¹. About 5000 of the face masks produced were donated to Kaduna State Government through the office of the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Balarabe Abbas Lawal. Others who received the donation of the face mask were Kaduna State Ministry of Health, Kaduna State vigilance Service (KADVS) and others some other security agencies integrated to enforce the lock down.

⁴⁰ Isa's Interview

⁴¹ Isa's Interview

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He added that the scheme also engaged in massive community education across the country that the disease is real and they should adhere to NCDC safety preventive measures. They pointed out that there were these skepticisms about the existence of the COVID-19 and a lot of fake news spreading around about the use of substances to cure the disease. However, Corps members were deployed to help educate people in every nooks and crannies about the dangers and existence, thereby demonstrating best practices to stay safe. Similarly, NYSC secretariat in Ogun state, donated 1126 face masks, 300 bottles of 600 ml liquid soap, 636 bottles of 100 ml hand sanitizer and cartons of noodles to Ogun State Government. The donations were received by the State Governor Dapo Abiodun who commended the efforts of NYSC for their contribution in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic in the State⁴². In addition, a Corp member is Ogun state joined the fight agaibst COVID-19 by producing and donating 200 high quality face masks to Ogun State Government through the office of the Deputy Governor, Engr Noimot Salako.⁴³

In the same vein, two Corps members Abimifolu Micheal and Manpasu Mathias serving in Iwo Local Government Area and Irewole Local Government Area respectively invented an automated and mechanized hand washing machine to help in the prevention of the spread of the deadly virus⁴⁴. Similarly, Corp members serving in Ido-Olowo/Ojuwoye

⁴² Tomori Uriel and Isa Gagarawa. "COVID-19: As NYSC Community Engagement Boost Nigeria's Response." Economic Confidential, April 30, 2020.

<https://economicconfidential.com/2020/04/nysc-community-engagement-boosts-nigeria/>

⁴³Igba Emmanuel. "Government Awards Face Mask Contract to Corps Member", 2020.

⁴⁴ "21st Century Pandemic NYSC's Engagement and Opportunities," Cover Story, 2020.

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community in Mushin LGA of Lagos State donated a COVID-19 sample collection booth to the community.⁴⁵

In August 2020, Corps members serving in Benue donated quality face masks to the Benue State Government to help in the fight against COVID-19. Another Corps member serving in Anambra State, Ifere Samuel donated his April federal allowance to the State Government. Hoda Bassey did same in Cross River. Another Corps member, Kolawole Omolara used her allowance in procurement of 20 cartons of noodles which she donated to the State Government to serve as palliative during the lockdown. Corps members in Boluwaduro local Government of Osun State and members of the Editorial Community Development service (CDS) group produced jingles to sensitise the masses on COVID-19 preventive protocols, thereby educating the public and creating awareness about the deadly virus.

The authorities the NYSC in the spirited effort to combat COVID-19 provided relevant facilities to enable the utilization of its orientation camps as isolation center due to the overwhelming increase in the number of patients in all designated isolation centers across the country⁴⁶. To commemorate 47th year of the scheme, the NYSC Osun State coordinator Mr. Ayodele Adewale Adegoke donated hand sanitizers, liquid hand wash and face masks to the Government and major hospitals in the State capital. Furthermore, Corps members in Onigbongbo LCDA in Ikeja LGA of Lagos State donated COVID-19 palliatives to the community⁴⁷. The donation was presented by the

⁴⁵ NYSC. "Lagos Corps members Donates COVID-19 Collection Booth." NYSC News, June 20, 2020. <https://www.nysc.gov.ng/>

⁴⁶ Chistopher Lots. "*Coprs members join Fight Against COVID-19 Pandemic.*" The Nation, April 12, 2020. Retrieved from; <https://themationonlineng.net/corps-members-join-fight-against-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁴⁷ NYSC Lagos, "Lagos Corp Members Donates COVID-19 Palliative to Onigbongbo LCDA" Daily, May 14, 2020. Retrieved from:
<https://www.dailynews.com.ng/nysclagos/posts/lagos-corps-members-donate-covid-19-palliative-to-onigbongbo-lcda>

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NYSC Lagos state coordinator, Mr Eddy Megwa and staff of the secretariat to the Chairman of council, Hon. Francis Babatunde, who commended the scheme for its effort in the fight against COVID-19. The NYSC Lagos state coordinator while presenting the items stated that the palliatives are part of NYSC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly NYSC Zamfara, on April 23, 2020, paid a visit to Gusau Orphanage. The visit was accompanied by the Zamfara NYSC state coordinator, Namalam Mohammed Taura, Management staff and Corp members of Charity CDS groups. They were received by the Director in charge of the orphanage home, Hajia Hauwa Tukur where they donated food items, sanitizers, liquid soaps and face masks. During the visit, the State coordinator stated that the visit was in line with the NYSC's desire to assist the Government and citizens of Zamfara state in tackling the spread of COVID-19.⁴⁸

The scheme has witnessed 110 Corps members bagging the president's honour award. This award was given to them for their exemplary performance and community development projects. The president's Honours Award is the highest category of recognition given to corps members who have shown exemplary leadership qualities. In the same vein, Two Corps members, Anaya Patient and Ukadike Ebuka respectively in Osun State during the issuance of certificate of National Service to 1412 batch B stream II corps members in the state. They were awarded for their outstanding contributions to the state despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Scheme has gained great respect from people around the world, through its initiatives and contribution to societal development. The scheme has helped to put a smile on the face of the populace in time of

⁴⁸ NYSC Zamfara State. "NYSC Zamfara donates palliative and covid-19 prevention materials to gusau orphanage." Facebook, April 23, 2020.

[Https://web.facebook.com/nysczamfara/posts/nysc-zamfara-donates-palliative-and-covid-19-prevention-materials-to-gusau-orpha/3076238715747555/?_rdc=1&_rdr](https://web.facebook.com/nysczamfara/posts/nysc-zamfara-donates-palliative-and-covid-19-prevention-materials-to-gusau-orpha/3076238715747555/?_rdc=1&_rdr)

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COVID-19 pandemic. The scheme used this period to intensify its good will image through continuous service delivery to the nation, hence patriotic service and progressive initiative increased. The scheme continuous development is essential for national development. The record of the scheme is continues just as it elevate hope and patriotism.

Government's Response to the Challenges of NYSC during COVID-19

In an interview with Isa Wana, he averred that the FGN saw with satisfaction the contribution of NYSC to the fight against COVID-19, with regards the scheme's public enlightenment campaigns about the existence of the disease and measures to keep safe, massive distribution of palliatives to the populace, massive distribution of Face masks, hand sanitizers and liquids soaps. These and other factors lead to consideration of the FGN for the scheme to reopen its orientation camps after satisfying NCDC COVID-19 guidelines.⁴⁹

The FGN in an effort to mitigate the challenges posed by COVID-19 to the NYSC scheme, the NYSC in consultation with the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 developed guidelines to enable the safe reopening of the NYSC 2020 orientation camps across the country.

Among the general measure in place are as follows; Prospective Corps Members will be tested for COVID-19 on arrival, therefore only those with negative result will be granted access into the NYSC orientation camp; Additional orientation camp will be provided in each state/FCT to reduce the number of participants in each camp to ensure physical distancing is observed; All Orientation camps will be fumigated/decontaminated prior to the commencement of the orientation activities, Physical distancing will be enforced, regular washing of hands, use of face mask and proper hygiene in all camps; Mandatory use of face mask by every Corps members will be ensured

⁴⁹ Isa's Interview

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by camp officials; There will be rearrangement of hostel beds to allow for space not less than 2 meters between beds, to ensure physical distance in compliance with COVID-19 protocol; Physical distance must be observed during lectures and the use of e-learning tool will be used to complete lectures; COVID-19 safety measures will be contained in the call-up letter as part of the content for prospective Corps members. All Corps members are required to fill the COVID-19 testing self reporting form before they can download their call up letters; There will be reduction in the numbers of participants during each orientation exercise to create spaces in the hostels to ensure physical distancing is adhered and better ventilation created; There will be sensitization of camp officials in addition to Corp members on COVID-19 required measures; There will be infection prevention control reminder and communication materials prominently displayed in every part of the camp; Hand hygiene setup will be stationed at strategic locations in the camp.⁵⁰

In addition to these published guidelines to ensure the safety of corp members and prevent the further transmission of the virus in all orientation camps across the country, an assessment tools was developed to inform baseline situation at the proposed NYSC orientation camps across the country. Readiness assessment was also conducted to ensure compliance with the key performance indicator (KPI) of COVID-19 preventive measures before the camps were reopened.

Furthermore, officials of the NCDC were deployed to NYSC orientation camps across the country to train and enlighten the Corps members of the COVID-19 prevention protocols. In line with these efforts, hand wash bases where built at every strategic point in the camps across the

⁵⁰ NCDC. "Guidelines On 2020 National Youth Service Corps NYSC Orientation Camp Activities", 2020. Retrieved from:
https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/media/files/Guidelines_on_2020_National_Youth_Service_Corps_NYSC_Orientation_camp_activities.pdf

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country and equipped with sterilized water, temperature test kit, liquid soaps and hand sanitizers. In addition, stringent measures were taken to ensure strict compliance with social distancing and the regular use of face mask by the Corps members and camp officials. These measures proved successful when in contrast with the number of Corps members that tested positive to the virus in recent times which have shown that the COVID-19 curve.

Conclusion

This study revealed that covid-19 exposed the weakness in the health system from few imported cases, countries are battling to save lives of thousands. In Nigeria, the study revealed there was inadequate preparedness, preventive and response strategy by the country's public health emergency unit which shows the need for an adequate preparedness plan and improved disease surveillance system. It also showed that the country's health facilities are inadequate to handle emergency health crisis due to COVID-19. Although there is a growing number of isolation facilities and intensive care units, however there are grossly inadequate protective equipments in these health facilities.

The study also revealed that despite impact of pandemic on NYSC- the country's leading youth organization with the highest significant contribution to the countries work force, the scheme has continue to confront the challenges bewildering Nigeria through the mobilization of youths and resources for sustainable development. During the raving period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the scheme through its management and corps members impacted the society through good will donations of palliatives and relief materials as support measures to curb the effect of the pandemic on economic development especially the populace. Despitess being on the frontline in the fight against the deadly virus, the Federal government took stringent measures to ensure the protection of these Corps members during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Finally, there is a need for the creation or expansion of NYSC facilities across the country by the State Governments to enable the scheme absorbs more prospective Corps members. This will help to close the gap in the deficiency of work force caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and will also contribute to the country's shrinking economy as more hand will be on deck in critical sectors of development.

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DG NYSC Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim undergoing Covid-19 test



Packaged face-masks from NYSC



Hand Sanitizers and Disinfectants produced by Corps Members



Distribution of Covid-19 prevention kits in Ekiti State



Disinfectant machines produced by Corps Members



Corps Members at work, producing face-masks



Disinfectant Chambers produced by Corps Members



Detergent produced by Corps Members in Akwa Ibom State



Demonstration on the use of Disinfectant Machine produced by
Corps Members



Covid-19 prevention kits produced and distributed by NYSC in Ekiti State.



Covid-19 Palliatives procured and distributed by NYSC, Abia.



Corps Members display face-masks produced at their Skill Acquisition Centre in Osisioma, Abia State.



Corps Members engaged in the production of hand sanitizers and detergents



Corps Members engaged in the production of face-masks



Corps Members display a Disinfectant Machine produced by them

National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), Covid-19 and the Safety...

8

National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), COVID-19 and the Safety of Corp Members

Jibunor Udoka Victor

Introduction

The idea of graduate youths in service to their countries has been practiced in different forms in USA, India and Egypt. In Nigeria, the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) is a youth organization which has facilitated the effective distribution of skilled manpower throughout the nation and also breaking social and culture barriers by building

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friendly bridges across cross-cultural backgrounds¹. Through the scheme, graduates of Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics with degree and HND respectively ages 30 years and below are mandated to undergo a one year national service. This scheme was introduced by the then Nigeria Military Government under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon, as a post conflict peace strategy. Historically, the policy that saw to the establishment of the NYSC can be traced back to the event that occurred in Nigeria between the years 1967–1970 characterized by the Nigerian Civil war. When the war ended in 1967, General Gowon-led administration formulated new policies that will encourage peace and promote reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Nation. Through decree N° 24 of 22nd May 1973 the NYSC was established. The scheme is aimed at producing disciplined and acculturated Nigerians through graduates undergoing National Service in the state other than their state of origin with a view to promote peace and encourage mutual understanding to foster National Unity and development.

Initially, university graduates, HND graduates and NCE holders participated in this programme, later only degree and HND holders were required to take part in the compulsory one-year National service. The graduates after due mobilization and documentation for the program, they are then referred to as Corp members. They will be required to undergo three weeks of training in their respective orientation camps in the 36 states of the federation including the FCT, after which they will be deployed to their places of primary assignment (PPAs). The graduates mark the end of the one year national service with a passing out parade (POP)².

¹ Okafor, C. and Ani JohnMary, K. 2014. The National Youth Service Corps Programme and Growing Security Threat in Nigeria; *Africa's Development Watch*; Vol 2 (2), 149-164

² Okafor, and Ani, The National Youth Service Corps Programme and Growing Security Threat in Nigeria.

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Although the program was established during the military regime, it has remained the summit of youth organization in Nigeria's democratic era that implements the policy of National Development through mobilization, deployment and development of youths potentials³. According to The Director General of NYSC, Brigadier-General Shuaibu Ibrahim, the scheme has recorded over 4.6 million graduates participating in the program since 1973 (As reported by Premium Times Nigeria, 2019)⁴. He opined that the scheme has contributed so much in encouraging unity amongst the youth and has significantly promoted National unity and development.

Achievements of the NYSC

There are Corps members in the 774 Local Government Area of Nigeria stimulating and promoting grass-root developments in all sectors of the Nigerian economy. In addition, inter ethnic marriages amongst Corps members have helped to promote national unity through tolerance and have reduced bigotry. The NYSC has significantly contributed to the nation's educational development. The posting of Corps members on teaching assignment has continued to close the gap in the education sector⁵. Over 70 percent of Corp members are deployed to teach especially in rural areas. Without the contribution of NYSC to primary and secondary schools in some parts of the country the educational system in these places would have collapsed.

³ Bodley-bond C. and Cronin, K. (2013); National Youth Service, employability, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods: Overview of the national youth service landscape in Sub-sahara Africa. Washington DC: Innovation in Civic Participation

⁴ Agency Report. "4.7 million Have participated in NYSC since inception-DG." Premium Times. August 15,2019. Premiuntimesng,

<https://www.premiuntimesng.com/news/top-news/346795-4-7-million-have-participated-in-nysc-since-inception-g-html>

⁵ Brigadier-General Ibrahim Shuaibu, "Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18th NYSC" 2019.

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In line with the scheme's mandate towards economic empowerment of the Corp members, the Skills acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) initiative of the scheme was introduced in 2012. The initiative has trained youths on agro-allied, ICT, Photography, power, automobile and education to mention a few. This program has sensitized 971,272 Corps members amongst which 476,879 Corp members completed the training. 7000 Corp members became business owners due to this initiative⁶.

Similarly, in 2012, the Youth Entrepreneurship Development Programme (YEDP) initiative was established by the Central bank of Nigeria to address challenges of unemployment and foster entrepreneurship spirit amongst the youth by providing the opportunity for affordable capital to fund their business ideas. A total of 1032 serving Corps members were trained in the NYSC/CBN/Heritage bank across seven centers.⁷ The scheme has helped to strengthen the nation's health care delivery system by collaborating with local and international agencies. Collaboration with agencies like Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UNICEF, Federal Ministry of Health, has witnessed over 700,000 Corps members received life skills training, consequently training over 10,800,000 secondary school students nationwide⁸.

Furthermore, in 2014, under the NYSC scheme, the Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers (HIRD) was flagged flag off in Igbo Owu community, in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State. Under this programme Corp medical personnel were mobilized to rural communities unable to

⁶ Webmaster. "7000-corps Members establish Thriving Business Through SAED." October 18th, 2017. Dailytrust, <https://dailytrust.com/7000-corps-members-establish-thriving-business-through-saed>

⁷ NYSC Yearbook, "*Historical Background of the Scheme*", 45 ANNIVERSARY, 2019, pp 23

⁸ Igba Emmanuel. "Government Awards Face Mask Contract to Corps Member," 2020.

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have access to adequate medical care due to the remoteness of their community. Since the launch of the NYSC-HIRD, the outreach has spread to several communities including the FCT. Through this intervention, over 500,000 rural dwellers have been treated by NYSC medical team. NYSC in collaboration with Grace Project International, had successfully donated 300 wheel chairs to the physically challenged⁹. The programme has helped to close the gap in healthcare limitations and mitigated the contemporary threat of inadequate medical care faced by most rural dwellers in Nigeria.

Amongst the efforts made by the scheme, in 2014, NYSC Combating Ebola Virus Disease (NYSC-COMEVD) programme was established. This was as a result of the threat the Ebola virus pose to Nigerians. The Pandemic already saw the man power in the medical sector over stretched. The NYSC COMEVID initiative was developed as a strategy to contribute to the National response to fight against the Ebola virus. This initiative was designed to train 1000 volunteer Corps members per State with adequate skills to serve as advocate to help in awareness creation and sensitization against the Ebola virus disease¹⁰.

In the same vein, the NYSC in collaboration with National Agency for the Control of Aids (NACA) carried out an HIV/AIDS sensitization campaign nationwide. This initiative has witnessed over 100,000 Corps members being trained as Peer Educators Trainers (PET). In the same vein, over 1000 NYSC schedule officers and zonal inspectors have also been trained as supervisors and project managers to enable the implementation at State and Local Government levels.¹¹ The collaboration between NYSC and Independent National Electoral Committee (INEC) was a strategy aimed at improving the credibility and promoting transparency in the nation's electoral processes. The

⁹ NYSC Yearbook, 2020, pp 30

¹⁰ NYSC Yearbook, 2020 pp 30

¹¹ Igba Emmanuel. "Government Awards Face Mask Contract to Corps Member," 2020

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synergy between NYSC and INEC saw Corps members being used as presiding officers. The professional conduct and patriotism exhibited by Corps members were impeccable which lead to the recognition of 75 Corp members by European Union Observation Mission in the 2019 general election for their outstanding performance¹². With the aforementioned, the relevance of the programme in promoting and encouraging national integration and socio-economic development cannot be over emphasized. However, despite the contributions of the scheme to Nigeria's socio-economic development in over four decades, there has been several challenges facing the scheme.

Challenges Facing the NYSC

There are several challenges that threaten the continued existence of the NYSC scheme. For instance, one of the objectives of the scheme is to imbibe in the youths the spirit of industry at work. However, there were concerns in the past that some Corps members barely engage in the primary assignments they are deployed to do, they only report to their PPAs during monthly clearance exercise to register their presence. But with the introduction of biometric clearance, the scheme has tackled this challenge and ensured that they are always on ground. Moreover, some tertiary institutions in Nigeria continue to produce more graduates leaving the NYSC with the challenge to organize orientation for them with lean resources. Consequently, the schemesometimes have a backlog of graduates anxiously awaiting national service for months, sometime years.This depreciate the motivation of the youths who are eager to serve.

The scheme also suffers from poor funding which affects some key operations. The poor amount paid in some States is discouraging and hadcaused some Corps members to lobby extensively for concessional posting.

¹²Brigadier-General Ibrahim Shuaibu, "Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18th NYSC", 2019.

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On the other hand, the outbreak of Coronavirus pandemic poses a great challenge to the scheme as NYSC witnessed a delay in its calendar consequently leading to the closure of its orientation camps on 18th March, 2020, As such, graduates due to be mobilized were forced to stay at home for close to a year¹³.

COVID-19 Outbreak in Nigeria

Corona virus disease also known as COVID-19 is a respiratory disease that has claimed so many lives worldwide. The index case of the virus was discovered in Wuhan China on 11th February, 2020 and spread to over 210 countries worldwide¹⁴. The COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by The World Health Organization (WHO) on 11th March, 2020. As at 24, February, 2020 there were a total of 112,722,651 confirmed cases of which 21,930,624 active cases, 88,293,677 recoveries and 2,498,350 deaths were recorded in all affected countries including Nigeria.¹⁵

In Nigeria, the index case of COVID-19 was an Italian citizen age 44 year who arrived Murtala Mohamed international airport Lagos, at 10:00pm from Milan on 24 February, 2020. Haven displayed symptoms of COVID-19 he was presented at a medical facility on 26th February, 2020 which later confirmed his COVID-19 status¹⁶. Prior his diagnosis, 216 persons were identified to have made initial contact with the infected patient, this lead to the spread of the virus within the country and beyond. Despitess all effort made by the Federal Government of Nigeria

¹³ Webmaster. "7000-corps Members establish Thriving Business Through SAED

¹⁴ Sobowale R. "*Nigerian Deaths from COVID-19 Second-Highest in West Africa.*" Vanguard. April, 2020. Retrieved from:

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/04/nigerian-deaths-from-covid-19-second-highest-in-west-africa/>.

¹⁵ Worldometer, s.v. "Coronavirus Live update," accessed February 28, 2021, https://www.worldometer.info/coronavirus/?utm_campaign=homeAdvegas?

¹⁶ OluwaseunOyeranti. and Babajide S. 2020. "The Evolution and Spread of Covid-19 in Nigeria"; CPEEL's Covid-19, Vol. II Discussion Papers Series.

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(FGN) to contain the outbreak, as at 24 February, 2020, the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), Nigeria's highest level of public health emergency has recorded over 150,246 confirmed cases, of which 126,417 patient has been discharged and 1,803 deaths, making Nigeria the second highest case of COVID-19 in west Africa¹⁷.

The COVID-19 pandemic however spurs the disruption of social and economic events worldwide including Nigeria. On the 18th March 2020, due to the fear of transmission of the COVID-19, the management of the NYSC, shut down its orientation camps nationwide which lead to the delay in calendar of the NYSC, as graduates due to be mobilized for NYSC orientation camp were made to sit at home till further notice¹⁸. Consequently, the activities of the organization were hampered as governments battle to save the lives of its citizens. As a strategy to prevent inter and intra state transmission of the virus, the FGN on 28th March, 2020 imposed a national lockdown.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on NYSC

Socio-economic activities all over the world have been disrupted due to the novel COVID-19 pandemic, which is majorly transmitted by physical contact. Similarly, in Nigeria, the FGN Lock-down order saw human migration, offices, market place, educational activities and social events were placed on hold indefinitely as FGN through the NCDC and relevant stakeholders try to contain with the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The NYSC is a scheme aimed at bringing out the best qualities in our youth and imbuing in them the right attitude and moral values for nation's building which serves as a catalyst for national unity and development, saw its calendar and activities delayed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

¹⁷Sobowale, Nigerian Death from COVID-19 Second Highest in West Africa.

¹⁸Maryam Hassan, "COVID-19: Over 66,000 Graduates May Miss NYSC Orientation Camp," Daily Nigeria, June 18, 2020.

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In the same vein, the Economic Sustainability Committee (ESC) led by the Vice President Prof. Yemi Osibanjo called on the FGN to consider suspending the NYSC orientation camp for two years to ensure the safety of Corp members¹⁹. If this policy is implemented 66,000 Batch A stream two Corp members due to be mobilized will be affected. However, the NYSC and a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) urge the FGN to have a rethink in approving this policy as such action will pose a greater danger to the nation. Pointing out that the NYSC provides information, execute project, promote welfare of Corps members and support the activities socio-economic growth of the nation.

In an interview with NYSC Kaduna state coordinator Mallam Isa Wana, he pointed out the outbreak of COVID-19 was quite an experience not forgetting to mention that during the outbreak of other communicable disease like Ebola, the measures taken were not as stringent as that taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. He said the impact of COVID-19 took effect on NYSC during the 2020 Batch A orientation camp. Half way into the camp's activities that authorities of the NYSC were noticed for the immediate closure of the camp to prevent further spread of the COVID-19. Corps members posted to their various places of primary assignments (PPA) were asked not to report, rather they should all go back home and observe the safety measures of COVID-19 as outlined by NCDC. This prevented further orientation camp as universities were closed.²⁰

In an interview with some NYSC Batch B, 2020 Corp members Emmanuel Tanko and Venessa Onoje at the Kaduna State secretariat, they commended the authorities of NYSC for the measures taken to ensure the safety of the Corp members during the orientation exercise,

¹⁹ R

²⁰ Isa Wana (Kaduna NYSC State Coordinator). Jibunor Victor, Kaduna State NYSC Seratariete, March 1, 2021

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however they stressed that some of the objectives of the scheme couldn't be realized as the physical distancing protocol was highly ensured by the camp officials thereby all physical contact activities were prohibited in compliance with COVID-19 protocol. They opined that some of the objectives of the scheme can be achieved only through physical contacts with one another and with their instructors.²¹

Measures taken by NYSC to Ensure Safety of Corp Members

The FGN through the NCDC in collaboration with NYSC authorities carried out prevention and protection measures to ensure the safety of Corp members. For instance, following the resumption of socio-economic, political and educational activities the NCDC worked with NYSC authorities to ensure the safe reopening of orientation camps for prospective Corp members and NYSC staffs. These safety protocols are aimed at strengthening infection prevention and control within the camp and promptly identifying outbreaks of COVID-19 in camps for treatment²². This effort led to the formulation of the 2020 NYSC orientation camp activities detailing critical information to guide Corp members during their service²³. The guidelines are as follows:

- All Corps members will be tested for COVID-19 on arrival. Only those with negative result will be allowed access into the NYSC orientation camp.

²¹ Emmanuel Tako (NYSC Batch B corp member). Jibunor Victor, Kaduna State NYSC Seratariete, February 23, 2021

²² Tomori Uriel and Isa Gararawa. "COVID19: As NYSC Community Engagement boosts Nigeria's Response." Economic Confidential, April 30, 2020.

<https://economicconfidential.com/2020/04/nysc-community-engagement-boosts-nigeria/response>

²³ National Center for Disease Control (NCDC); *Guidelines on 2020 National Youth Service Corps NTSC Orientation Camp Activities*. NCDC Media Files, 2020. Retrieved from; https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/meia/files/Guidelines_on_2020_National_Youth_Service_Corps_NYSC-Orientation_Camp_activities.pdf

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- Additional orientation camp will be provided in each state/FCT to reduce the number of participants in each camp to ensure physical distancing is observed.
- All Orientation camp will be fumigated/decontaminated prior to the commencement of the orientation activities, Physical distancing will be enforced, regular washing of hands, use of face mask and proper hygiene in all camps
- Compulsory temperature check at the entrance of every Camp
- Compulsory use of face mask by every Corp member will be ensured by camp officials
- There will be rearrangement of hostel beds to allow for space not less than 2 meters between beds, to ensure physical distance in compliance with COVID-19 protocol.
- Physical distance must be observed during lectures and the use of e-learning tool will be used to complete lectures.
- COVID-19 safety measures will be contained in the call-up letter as part of the content for prospective Corp members. All Corp members are required to fill the COVID-19 testing self reporting form before they can download their call up letters.
- Deliberate reduction in the numbers of participants during each orientation exercise to create spaces in the hostels to ensure physical distancing is adhered and better ventilation created.
- There will be sensitization of camp officials in addition to Corp members on COVID-19 required measures
- There will be infection prevention control reminder and communication materials prominently displayed in every part of the camp
- Hand hygiene setup will be stationed at strategic locations in the camp.

To ensure proper implementation of these guidelines, readiness assessment was conducted throughout all NYSC orientation camps to ensure compliance with NCDC directives of COVID-19 preventive

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measures for the safe reopening of orientation camp. In addition, the NYSC in collaboration with NCDC held a webinar with Corp members and a media chat with the press, sensitizing the public on effort to ensure safe reopening of NYSC orientation camps across the country and also urging state NYSC officials, state ministries of Health and other relevant stakeholders to take ownership of all COVID-19 related operations and activities across the NYSC camps in their respective states²⁴.

The Director General NYSC Brigadier-General Shuaibu Ibrahim has directed all NYSC state coordinators to comply strictly with the COVID-19 prevention and safety protocols in all Orientation camps stressing that NYSC will not hesitate to decamp any Corps member who violates the guidelines aimed at preventing the transmission of COVID-19.²⁵ He stated this while interacting in a virtual joint meeting between NYSC and NCDC officials. He pointed out that necessary facilities were made available in all the NYSC orientation camps adding that prospective Corp member and NYSC camp officials will be subjected to corona virus testing as a precondition to gain entrance into the camp. Officials of NCDC led by Dr Oyeladun Okunromade, during the meeting commended the efforts by NYSC in response to COVID-19, stressing that it is a functional model worthy to be replicated in other sector to enhance community testing thereby safeguarding the health of the nation²⁶. She expressed satisfaction with the facilities put in place by NYSC to ensure compliance to the prevention and safety protocol during the orientation exercise. However, She called for increased vigilance and cooperation to consolidate the success achieved so far in the fight against COVID-19.

²⁴ Tomori and Isa, *COVID19: As NYSC Community Engagement boosts Nigeria's Response.*

²⁵ Kanayo Umeh." NYSC Direct Strict Compliance With COVID-19 Protocols." Guardian, January 13, 2021. <https://guardian.ng/news/nysc-directs-strict-compliance-with-covid-19-protocols>

²⁶ Kanayo Umeh." NYSC Direct Strict Compliance With COVID-19 Protocols.

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In an interview with NYSC coordinator Kaduna State, Mallan Isa Wana, he stated that NYSC carried out a mass mobilization of resources in order to put measures in place to ensure safety of its Corp members. For instance, Corp members were mobilized to build hand wash basin in every strategic place in the camp citing example that Kaduna State orientation camp has 21 hand washing points and the water they put there are being sterilized by hypo. All the hand washing points were equipped with hand sanitizers, liquid soaps and temperature test kits 17.²⁷

The safety protocols at various NYSC orientation camps nationwide have helped to ensure the safety of crops members in orientation camps. The effort has led to the detection of 731 COVID-19 confirmed cases amongst camp officials and Batch B Corp members in 2020. The PTF Chairman Boss Mustapha stated that these cases were recorded from orientation participantsin every State of the Federation²⁸. He opined that it is an indicator for the camp officials to strengthen and intensify efforts in the fight against COVID-19. While speaking at the briefing, he urged prospective Corp member to ensure they follow COVID-19 guidelines and protocols to help prevent further transmission of the virus.

Similarly, Cross River recorded a total of 189 confirmed cases as of January, 2021 according to the NCDC. The Cross River state commissioner for Health Betta Edu stated that the number is highest confirmed cases ever recorded in the State and has attributed it to the Corp members posted to the state for national service. He pointed that 13 of the Corp members posted to Cross River state tested positive to

²⁷ Isa's Interview

²⁸ NYSC Zamfar State. "NYSC ZAMFARA DONATES PALLIATIVE AND COVID-19 PREVENTION MATERIALS TO GUSAU ORPHANAGE." Facebook, April 23, 2020.

https://web.facebook.com/NYSCZamfara/posts/nysc-zamfara-donates-palliative-and-covid-19-prevention-materials-to-gusau-orpha/3076238715747555/?_rdc=1&_rdr

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COVID-19²⁹. He urged the FGN and relevant stake holders to intensify their effort in the fight against COVID-19 and urge everyone to endeavor to comply with the NCDC COVID-19 guidelines.

Contributions of NYSC to the Fight against COVID-19

The NYSC relentlessly delivered the vision of the scheme to the door step of Nigerians and the government with a sense of enthusiasm. The scheme helped to confront some of the challenges bewildering Nigerians by mobilizing youth and resources for sustainable national development. The sacrifices the scheme made was without doubt needful at these trying times of COVID-19. The DG Brigadier-General Shuaibu Ibrahim urge the Corp members in the 774 Local Government Areas of Nigeria not to trivialize the COVID-19 but to deploy their skills in fight against the deadly virus as they have being equipped with the mental capacity and skills to ensure their productivity and expertise are harnessed to solve problems of Nigerians³⁰. The scheme and its values were deployed at all levels.

Production and Donation of Face masks and Hand Sanitizers

Corp members deployed to remote communities, having being trained in Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development in tailoring, carpentry, cosmetics amongst others helped in providing humanitarian services for the people in their respective communities. For instance, Corps members in Ogun State in the spirited effort of NYSC joined the fight against COVID-19 by producing and donating 200 high quality face mask to Ogun State government. The donation received by the Deputy Governor Engr Noimot Slako and the Secretary to the State Government Mr. Tokunbo Talabi and the Governor's Chief of Staff Alhaji Salisu Shuaib, thanked the Corp members for their effort and service to the nation. The Corps members were also contracted to produce an additional 2000 pieces of face mask worth 300,000.00

²⁹Utomwem, Tackling NYSC Security Challenge,

³⁰Kanayo, *NYSC Direct Strict Complinace with COVID-19 Protocols*

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Naira adding that on delivery, they might be contracted to produce additional 5000 pieces.³¹

NYSC Zamfara State, on 23 April, 2020 in a bid to assist the Zamfara State Government in the fight against COVID-19, paid a visit to Gusau Orphanage. The visit was accompanied by the Zamfara NYSC state coordinator, Namalam Mohammed Taura, Management staff and Corp members of Charity CDS groups, they were received by the Director in charge of the orphanage home, Hajia Hauwa Tukur were they donated food items, sanitizers, liquid soaps and face masks. During the visit the state coordinator stated that the visit was in line with the NYSC's desire to assist the Government and citizens of Zamfara state in tackling the spread of COVID-19. He stressed that the food items be used by the management to benefit the children in the orphanage home and asked them to comply with the NCDC COVID-19 prevention protocol³².

Similarly, COVID-19 palliatives were donated to Onigbongbo Local Council Development (LCDA) Ikeja area of Lagos State by Logos Corp Members serving in the community. The visit was led by Lagos state NYSC coordinator, Mr, Eddy Megwa and staff of the secretariat. They were received by the Chairman of Onigbogbo LCDA, Hon. Francis Babtunde Oke, who thanked NYSC for their donation to the community. The NYSC Lagos state coordinator while presenting the items stated that the palliatives are part of NYSC response to the COVID-19

³¹Igba Emmanuel, "Government Awards Face Mask Contract to Corps Member," 2020.

³²NYSC Zamfara State. "NYSC ZAMFARA DONATES PALLIATIVE AND COVID-19 PREVENTION MATERIALS TO GUSAU ORPHANAGE." Facebook, April 23, 2020. https://web.facebook.com/NYSCZamfara/posts/nysc-zamfara-donates-palliative-and-covid-19-prevention-materials-to-gusau-orpha/3076238715747555/?_rdc=1&_rdr

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pandemic, and further stressed that the scheme will continue to do more in the fight against the deadly virus³³.

In addition, Corps members in Garment Factory at Minna, Niger State capital in their effort to combat the virus donated 1,000 face masks to Niger State Government. Similarly, NYSC secretariat in Ogun state donated 300 pieces of 600ml of liquid soaps, 636 pieces of 100ml hand sanitizers, 1126 pieces of face masks and cartons of noodles. An effort which was applauded by Ogun State Governor, Dapo Abiodun, who commended the scheme in the effort towards fighting the virus especially in areas of sensitization of the public and thanked the Corp medical personnel for remaining in the state to join effort to fight against the virus even in the face of imminent danger³⁴. In the same vein, Corps members in Benue State, Ebonyi State, Taraba State and the FCT respectively were seen to have donated face masks, hand sanitizers and palliatives to their state government to help in the fight against COVID-19.

Invention of Automated Hand Wash Machine

Corp member, Abimifolu Micheal serving in Iwo Local Government Area and Manpasu Mathias serving in Irewole Local Government Area invented an automated and a mechanized hand washing machine respective to help in the fight against COVID-19. The machines were commissioned at the state secretariat by the State Coordinator³⁵. Through these various engagements of the scheme, some Corp members got themselves contracted by the Government and an NGO to

³³ NYSC Lagos. "Lagos Corps Members Donate Covid-19 Palliative to Onigbongbo LCDA." Facebook, May 18, 2020. <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/officialnysclagos/posts/lagos-corps-members-donate-covid-19-palliative-to-onigbongbo-lcda-as-the-country-3055232404529860>

³⁴ Tomori and Isa, "COVID-19: As NYSC Community Engagement Boost Nigeria's Response."

³⁵ "21st Century Pandemic NYSC's Engagement and Opportunities," Cover Story, 2020

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produce some protective equipment in large quantities, an opportunity which arise due to their involvement in the fight against the spread of the COVID-19.

Engagement of Corps Medical Personnel

The national effort to test, treat and contain the spread of COVID-19 is another clarion call for Corps members which explain the overwhelming response of Corp medical personnel in their fight against the deadly virus nationwide. In Anambra state, the NYSC State coordinator, Mr Kehinde Aremu applauded the Corp medical personnel in their relentless effort in the fight against COVID-19, stressing that the training and mentoring of NCDC and Nigeria Medical Association was justified. He stated this at a get together organized by the Corps members at the NYSC orientation camp, Umuawulu. He opined that Corps medical personnel consistently adhere to the COVID-19 testing and prevention protocols which shows the significance of the proper training they received from the members of the NCDC³⁶. In the same vein, a COVID-19 sample collection booth was donated to Ido-Olowo/Ojuwoye LCDA in Mushin by Corps members serving in the community.³⁷

In an interview with Mallam Isa wana, he stated that during the lockdown medical Corps members nationwide were made to remain and were integrated into the State team of COVID-19 in every state of the federation. These Corps members were in the frontline in the fight against COVID-19. He added that NYSC carried out massive community education. He mentioned there was skepticism in the existence of COVID-19 adding that many communities did not believe in the existence of the deadly disease. However, Corps members were asked to educate communities about the existence of the virus and best

³⁶ Kanayo, *NYSC Direct Strict Compliance with COVID-19 Protocol*.

³⁷ NYSC. "Lagos Corps members Donates COVID-19 Collection Booth." NYSC News, June 20, 2020. <https://www.nysc.gov.ng/>

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practice to prevent the spread of the virus. In addition, NYSC Kaduna state through the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Department produce about 10,000 face masks were sown by Corps members and was distributed to key agencies. 5000 face mask was given to Kaduna State government through the Office of Secretary to the State Government, Kaduna State Ministry of Health and others were given some established Security Agencies that were enforcing the lockdown³⁸.

Sensitization of the Public on COVID-19

Medical CorpS members across the country did not only engage themselves in hospital activities, Rather, through radio and television shows, they help in sensitizing the public about dangers of COVID-19 and best practices to avoid contracting the virus by wearing face, observing social distancing, avoiding crowded places, avoiding physical contact, regularly washing your hands and avoid physical contact. Similarly, the scheme Partners with NITDA through its ICT unit and opened up a social media platform through which every citizen in the 774 LGA were Corp members are domicile can reach out to them. This is an effort made by the scheme to combat fake news across the country.³⁹

Use of Orientation Camps as Isolation Centers

The overwhelming increase in numbers of confirmed case consequently led to the congestion of Government designated isolation centers nationwide. This necessitated the management of NYSC to contribute to the efforts of FGN in combating and containing the COVID-19 spread. The scheme adequately provided relevant facilities

³⁸ Isa's Interview

³⁹Nationa Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA). "Partnership with NITDA will Checkmate the Spread of Fake news on Social Media –DG NYSC." NITDA NEWS, June 24, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://nitda.gov.ng/partnership-with-nitda-will-checkmate-the-spread-of-fake-news-on-social-media-dg-nysc/>

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which saw to the utilization of its orientation camps as isolation centers for the treatment of citizens⁴⁰.

Corp members donate monthly allowance to Cross River and Bauchi State

In Cross River and Bauchi States, Corp members, Hodo Bassey and Andra Daniel reportedly donated their monthly allowance 33,000 Naira to the State Governments as an effort to contribute to the fight against the COVID-19.⁴¹

Conclusion

The study highlighted the tremendous contributions of National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) to national unity and development. The challenge the scheme faced as a result of COVID-19 pandemic was highlighted. The study revealed that NYSC made significant contributions to the fight against COVID-19 through the mobilization of its Corps medical personnel, donation of food items to the vulnerable and less privilege, donation of face masks and hand sanitizers, sensitization of the public about COVID-19 and utilization of its orientation camps as isolation centers. However, the study also stressed the need for increased vigilance and cooperation to consolidate the success achieved so far in the fight against COVID-19 by adhering strictly to NCDC COVI-19 prevention protocols. In addition, there is a need for the establishment of more NYSC facilities in the 36 states of the federation including the FCT to enable the scheme accommodate more Corps members and also abide by the COVID-19 protocol. This will help to close the gap caused by downsizing of prospective corps members in camp which has

⁴⁰Christopher Lots. "Corps members join Fight Against COVID-19 Pandemic." The Nation, April 12, 2020. Retrieved from; <https://themationonlineng.net/corps-members-join-fight-against-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁴¹Desmond Adeoye. "NYSC member donates allowance to Bauchi State Palliative Committee on COVID-19." PSR ng, May 20, 2020. <https://www.psr.ng/nysc-member-donates-allowance-to-bauchi-state-palliative-committee-on-covid-19>

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consequently affected the labour force with a resultant negative effect on the nation's socio-economic development.

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9

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and COVID-19 Infection Management

Eduvwie, Nyerohwo Avi

Introduction

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), is a graduate programme meant specifically for graduates of tertiary institutions (particularly Polytechnic and University) to give an active or compulsory service to the nation for one year as a way of integrating them to other geographical region in the country. The primary purpose of the scheme is to instil in them the spirit of national service or selfless service to the respective communities of Place of Primary Assignment (PPA), and which stress the need for corps members to display the spirit of

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oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians irrespective of culture or social background¹. The history of the nation since independence points to the need for unity among the people and the future professionals were at the center of the initiative.² This category of young professionals from different academic fields who are called upon to serve the nation after graduating from higher institutions of learning are referred to as corps members or in the local parlance “corpers”.

However, these pace-setters and their activities were threatened by the novel corona virus, COVID-19 Pandemic when the NYSC Director-General through a recommendation from Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 ordered the suspension of the 2020 Batch ‘A’ Stream ‘One’ Orientation Course after a week of resumption. This action was taken in the interest of the corps members and camp officials especially reducing the spread of the Corona Virus on the nation’s population and avoids it overwhelming the health sector. Thus, the study is the evaluation of the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the NYSC programme, particularly examining the rate of infection, management and casualty on Corps members and staff of the scheme.

The NYSC and the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD)

The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), primarily known with its high rate of casualty among humans after its first outbreak in 1976³ and the replication of the outbreak around some East and Central African countries⁴reproduced a virus that spreads to the West African states.

¹NYSC, *NYSC Handbook*, Abuja: National Youth Service Corps, 1992, p. 1.

²O.M Adesope, *Attitude of Corps in Akwa Ibom State towards the NYSC Programme*. Omoku: (Molsyfem United Services, 1993).

³Pan American Health Organisation and World Health Organisation, “Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) Implications of Introduction in the Americas”; *Corrigendum*, August 2014; R. Hoenen & H. Ebola, “Ebola Virus in West Africa and the Use of Experimental Therapies or Vaccines”, *BMC Biol*; 2014, p. 12.

⁴C. Brown, et al, “Ebola Virus Disease: the Black Swan in West Africa”, *Trop Doctor*, 2014.

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The epidemic was so widely spread and extremely deadly that the World Health Organisation (WHO) recorded over 28,714 confirmed cases of the virus with over 11,372 deaths⁵, which amounted to 39.6% fatal death⁶. The outburst of the virus in Nigeria in September 2014 brought a scare to the Nigerian people⁷ and its socio-economic structures, such that it affected social and economic engagements between individuals. This impacted negatively on the attitude of people towards each other and coupled with reportage of the virus, most institutions and countries were forced to shut their doors against customers and foreign nationals, and various governments within affected African countries closed down schools in their respective nations.

In the light of the above, the National Youth Service Corps was made to shut down its Batch 'B' Orientation Course abruptly for fear of contracting⁸ or spread of the virus in States of the Federation. This came after the Federal Government postponed resumption date of Primary and Secondary Schools in the country due to the outbreak of the epidemic⁹. The epidemic altered the scheme in the country, especially that the Orientation Course meant for about 21 days, which focus is mainly for sensitisation and skill acquisition was limited to eight days within which corps members reported to their Place of Primary

⁵Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Years of Ebola Virus Disease Outbreaks", www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/history, retrieved 28 February 2021.

⁶K.K Salami, M. Ayegboin & I.A Adedeji, "Ebola Outbreak in Nigeria: Perceptions from Commercial Motorcyclists and Passengers in Ibadan, Nigeria", *Health Education Research Vol. 34 (1)*, 2019, p. 2.

⁷K.K Salami, M. Ayegboin & I.A Adedeji, "Ebola Outbreak in Nigeria: Perceptions from Commercial Motorcyclists and Passengers in Ibadan, Nigeria", *Health Education Research Vol. 34 (1)*, 2019, p. 2.

⁸D. Adesulu, "Ebola: NYSC Modifies Corps' Camping Exercise", www.vanguardngr.com, August 28, 2014.

⁹D. Adesulu, "Ebola: NYSC Modifies Corps' Camping Exercise", www.vanguardngr.com, August 28, 2014.

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Assignment. In specific terms, the NYSC reviewed its activities, a communication made through its website stated;

In consideration of the presidential pronouncement that... the abridged version of the 2014 Batch 'B' Orientation Course is scheduled to commence from first to eight of September 2014.... Prospective Corps Members are to equally note that the registration process will not take more than one hour. Thereafter, they are to collect their kits and proceed immediately to their states of deployment... for the completion of the remaining formalities.¹⁰

Thus the EVB changed the course of things in the NYSC programme, particularly, the scheme suspended its camp exercises in all the states of the federation; the registration process was also reduced to a maximum of one hour; also, the corps members were subjected to a mild way of registrations that became very tedious. The NYSC Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme was suspended due to the outbreak of the Ebola Virus, such that corps members under Orientation Course Batch 'B' Stream 'I' did not benefit from the SAED programme that is meant to provide acquired skills and entrepreneurship.

The NYSC Reactions to the Ebola Virus

The National Youth Service Corps and State Governments made frantic efforts in combating the virus among corps members, and as such medical and hygienic facilities were distributed to various camps of the federation. For instance, the N.Y.S.C 2014 Batch 'B' Orientation Course, Ebonyi State Orientation Camp Clinic was equipped with modern diagnostic facilities for testing of suspected cases of the EVD epidemic,

¹⁰NYSC, "NYSC Modifies Camping Exercise", www.nysc.ng.com, Posted August 27, 2014, Retrieved March 2, 2021.

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to preventing any outbreak and spread of the world's deadliest viral hemorrhagic fever in the camp¹¹. At the presentation event, corps members were made to understand that Ebonyi camp was one of the first in the country to procure diagnostic equipment because of its high regards for the lives and health of corps members¹². Some of the equipment delivered to the camp included personal protective equipment; disposable gowns, facemasks, head covers; disinfectants and a box diagnostic set to ease early detection of pharyngitis.

In Delta State, the NYSC Coordinator also made available hand washing facilities such as soap/detergent and hand sanitisers¹³, which were placed at various strategic places in the camp. Also, Anambra State Government made donations of automated hand sanitisers for the use of corps members and staff of the scheme participating in the state¹⁴. A total of 10 Automated Hand Sanitisers were donated to the NYSC camp at Umunya Oyi Local Government Area. The hand sanitisers, according to the state official, Mr. Okafor, was a proactive measure to forestall the Ebola Virus outbreak and spread in Anambra State¹⁵. He further noted that the sanitisers did not only combat Ebola virus, but also act as a major check for other contagious pandemic such as Diarrhea, cough, catarrh and conjunctivitis, among others, which thrives in high density and populated location such as the orientation camp.

The Lagos State Ministry of Health and Chairman NYSC Lagos State and the erstwhile Commissioner for Special Duties, Dr. Wale Ahmed, assured corps members of government and other international

¹¹C. Okereke, "Ebola Virus: Ebonyi Camp Takes Preventive Measures", *Journal of the NYSC Directorate*, Abuja: NYSC News; 2014, p. 55.

¹²C. Okereke, "Ebola Virus: Ebonyi Camp Takes Preventive Measures" ... 2014.

¹³NYSC News, "Corps Members Advised on Ebola", *Journal of the NYSC Directorate*, Abuja: NYSC News; 2014, p. 56.

¹⁴F.N Obiekwe, "Anambra Government Supports NYSC to Combat Ebola, Donates Sanitisers", *Journal of the NYSC Directorate*, Abuja: NYSC News; 2014, p. 57.

¹⁵F.N Obiekwe, "Anambra Government Supports NYSC to Combat Ebola, Donates Sanitisers" ... 2014.

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organization support to lessen the spread of the dreaded EVD¹⁶. Also, former Chairman of NYSC Governing Board, Chief Gordon Bozimo, also urged corps members to avoid anybody noticed to be having severe fever, stressing that the only first aid one could offer at that instance was vacating the room and call the camp officials for help. Lastly, Disu Oyewale, an official of the Communication and Community Mobilisation for the Ebola Virus Disease, educated corps members on how to link up with social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to get update on the prevention of EVD and to abide by the rules of good hygiene as means of prevention.

COVID-19 Outbreak in Nigeria

The corona virus epidemic is an infectious disease caused by a severe acute respiratory syndrome called corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).¹⁷ The disease was first discovered in December 2019 in the Chinese Provinces of Wuhan and Hubei, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared it a pandemic in March 11, 2020¹⁸.Nigeria recorded its first confirmed case on 27 of February 2020, following an Italian national who tested positive to the virus¹⁹. However, Nigeria recorded its first confirmed case of the virus, after an Italian national who tested positive to the virus on the 27 of February 2020 in Lagos State²⁰. The nation

¹⁶A. Oviedje, “Lagos State Government Enlightens Corps Members on Ebola Disease”, *Journal of NYSC Directorate Headquarters*, Abuja: NYSCNews; 2014.

¹⁷African Union, “Corona virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)”, www.africacdc.org, retrieved 2021.

¹⁸World Health Organisation, “WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19”, www.who.int, 11 March 2019.

¹⁹J. Amzat, K. Aminu and M. Danjibo, “Coronavirus Outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and Socio-Medical Response during the First 100 Days”, *International Journals of Infectious Diseases*, 2020, p. 98.

²⁰J. Amzat, K. Aminu and M. Danjibo, “Coronavirus Outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and Socio-Medical Response during the First 100 Days”, *International Journals of Infectious Diseases*, 2020, p. 98.

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recorded a second case of the virus on the 9th March 2020, which came through contact of the index case.

With the increase of Covid19 cases in Nigeria, the Nigerian Federal Government announced a 14 days lockdown on the 30th of March 2020; it targeted major states (Lagos and Ogun) of the federation and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja²¹. While other states, also responded to the COVID-19 hikes were shut down by their respective State Governors. Most of these reported cases, were most notable Nigerians, particularly political elites such as the Son of the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, Mohammed Abubakar, Abba Kyari, Bauchi's Governor Bala Mohammed, Nasir El-Rufai among others tested positive to the novel virus. Although the restriction was lifted, more cases of the corona virus continue to emerge.

In now what is referred to as recent surge of the Covid19 in most of the states of the federation; State Governors, senators, traditional rulers and their appointees became vulnerable to the virus. For instance, a week after the Delta State Secretary to the Government and the Commissioner of Information tested positive, his daughter was reported to have the pandemic, within the same week the State Governor and his wife became infected of the virus. Akeredolu-Ale, the Governor of Ondo State, the Deputy Governor of Bauchi State, Baba Teba, and among others, and with the cases rising to over 28,167 as at 05/07/2020, there were complaint of denials by people from the political elites.

For instance, the chairman of the Presidential Task Force, Boss Mustapha, expressed the attitude of the people towards the Pandemic, especially failing to observe the guidelines put together by the Nigerian Center For Disease Control (NCDC). He urged Nigerians on June 25 "I

²¹O. Kola, "COVID-19: Nigeria Announces Lockdown of Major Cities", www.aa.com.tr, March 29, 2020.

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am appealing to Nigeria, let's take this thing seriously”²². Following the surge of positive cases among Governor Ortom’s political appointees coupled with his wife and son, the Benue’s governor had appealed to his people “Covid19 is real and I enjoin my people to take it seriously”²³. This message continue to be a rallying call for the Nigerian people who were living in self-denial of a virus that has infected over 11 million people around the globe and killed over five hundred thousand persons between December 2019 to July 2020.

The NYSC Scheme and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic in no doubt affected the activities of the scheme, as well as threatening to put the NYSC Programme in limbo. The suspension of 2020 Batch ‘A’ Stream ‘One’ Orientation Course, caused a lot of scare, particularly fear of the scheme winding up²⁴. It is important to state here at this moment that around 2018, the NYSC scheme came under strong criticism, especially from those who believed that the Agency was not a contributory one hence, it should be scrapped²⁵. The suspension of the Orientation Course and closure of NYSC camps in the federation would have reignited the above call, but for the leadership of the scheme. Corps members were able to galvanise the necessary skills received in the course of its Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED)programme in the camp and with support from the scheme these skills were put to use through the production of personal protective equipment, disinfectants and automated hand washing machines.

²²A. R. A. Shabah, “Nigeria Coronavirus: Cases Hit 10,162”, www.africanews.com, July 1, 2020.

²³BBC News, “COVID-19: Governor Ortom Wife, Eunice, Son and Staff of Benue State First Lady Test Positive for Coronavirus”, www.bbc.com/pidgin, 4 July 2020.

²⁴Ruth Okwumbu, “NYSC’s Orientation suspension only a precautionary measure – DG, NYSC”, *Nairametrics*, March 18, 2020.

²⁵Jide Akintunde, “The NYSC Should be scrapped”, www.financialnigeria.com; 11 October 2018.

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Apart from the above, several orientation camps were used as isolation centers to further increase the contribution of the scheme for the overall effort of the control of the pandemic. The scheme became characterized as one of the driving force for combating the spread of corona virus in the country²⁶. Unlike the nominal role played by corps members at the outbreak of the Ebola virus disease²⁷, the NYSC scheme has been at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of receiving donations from the scheme or government officials corps members became donors to communities, Local Government Areas and States of the federation.

The responsiveness of the NYSC scheme to prevailing national needs or emergencies, were brought to light again with its role in the battle to contain the spread of the corona virus. Corps members made their impacts felt through mass production and donations of facemasks, antiseptic liquid soaps and hand sanitisers to the FCT and States all over the federation²⁸. This productive quality of corps members was attributed to the Scheme's SAED programme especially tailoring and cosmetology skills. The youth were thoroughly trained, and it made them discharge such given tasks as may be required, effectively. They were trained to produce soaps, sanitisers, facemasks, among others. These skills helped corps members and NYSC to achieve its objectives in inculcating the spirit of self-reliance, especially for those engaged during the pandemic.

²⁶Adetola Bademosi, "COVID-19: NYSC Commends Corps Members on Production of Safety Kits", www.tribuneonlineng.com, February 17, 2021.

²⁷C. Okereke, "Ebola Virus: Ebonyi Camp Takes Preventive Measures", *Journal of the NYSC Directorate*, Abuja: NYSC News; 2014, p. 55.

²⁸Media Assessment, "How we are Rebranding NYSC for Youth Empowerment, Revenue Generation", Exclusive interview of Brig. Shuaibu Ibrahim, D.G, NYSC by Economic Confidential, May 17, 2020, Leadwatch Publication Ltd., 2020.

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To curb the spread of the virus, the Director General through the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 suspended the 2020 Batch ‘A’ Stream ‘One’ Orientation Course after less than Seven Days in camp activities on the 18 of March 2020. Also, on March 20, 2020 the scheme further suspended biometric clearance and community development service (CDS)for all members of the scheme²⁹. According to the NYSC Director-General, Brig. Gen. Ibrahim, that these measures were “driven by the high premium we place on the welfare of corps members and our staff”³⁰. On March 2020, the nation’s COVID-19 cases had risen to two³¹, and the WHO following Italy and China’s COVID-19 situations had declared the virus a pandemic, March 11, 2020³². Most countries of the world had placed restrictions on social and economic activities, particularly, the Nigerian Government declared a national health emergency on three states of the federation; Abuja, Lagos and Ogun States.

The Nigerian Vice President, Professor Yemi Osibanjo, on June 2020, citing a recommendation from the Economic Sustainability Committee (ESC), proposed the suspension of orientation course for two years, while deployment of corps members to places of primary assignment would continue without recourse to the compulsory three weeks camp exercise. This, according to the VP was “to address the disruption caused by the pandemic and ensuring social distancing measures at all

²⁹T. Omalana, “NYSC Orientation Camp Gets Resumption Date”, www.t.guardian.com, 15 October 2020.

³⁰Economic Confidential, NYSC: Rebranding for Revenue Generation, Youth Empowerment-Brig. Shuaib, D.G”, Vol. 13 (154), July, 2020, p. 17.

³¹CGTN, “Nigeria Announces 2nd Case of COVID-19”, www.africa.cgtn.com, March 9, 2020.

³²World Health Organisation, “WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19”, www.who.int, 11 March 2019.

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levels of education"³³.However, in September, the Chairman of the Presidential Task Force for COVID-19, Sani Aliyu, instructed the NYSC to begin preparation for possible resumption of Orientation Course and the PTF announced 10th of November 2020 for reopening of orientation camps all over the country.³⁴

The reopening of orientation camp inNovember 2020 and January 19, 2021, was made possible because of the efforts of staff and corps members of the scheme during the lockdown, in which they showed efficacies in the course of discharging their duties and as frontline service providers on the fight against the spread of the pandemic. For instance, the NYSC became the first Government organization to engage in the production of COVID-19 protective equipment, especially the manufacturing of Sanitizers, Face Masks, Face Shields, and Automated Hand Sanitisers, among others. This contribution earned the NYSC Kaduna State Secretariat a letter of commendation and the receipt of the hand sanitisers distributed by corps members from the Governor Kaduna State, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai.

Thus, the reopening of NYSC orientation camps has come with the NCDC COVID-19 guidelines, in which the corps members are meant to obey, which is a pre-requisite for the continuation of orientation exercises around the country. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in discussion with the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and NCDC has developed guidelines to promote the safe conduct of the 2020 NYSC orientation camp exercises in all the camps around the country³⁵. However, the NCDC has recorded COVID-19 infections, particularly, Batch 'A' Stream One corps members of the scheme recorded about 108

³³D. Erezi, "Osibanjo's Economic Committee Recommends Suspension of NYSC Camps", www.t.guardian; 16 June 2020.

³⁴C. Olisa, "PTF on COVID-19 Certifies NYSC Orientation Camps Ready to Open on November 10", www.nairametrics.com, November 10, 2020.

³⁵NCDC, "Guidelines on 2020 National Youth Services Corps (NYSC) Orientation Camp Activities", www.ncdc.gov.ng, retrieved 6th of March, 2021.

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cases in its screening³⁶. While Batch B recorded over seven hundred and thirty one (731) cases out of about thirty three thousand and four hundred and nineteen thousand (33,419) of corps members tested through COVID-19 RDT Testing.³⁷ facilities available in all the camps of the States in the federation.

In specifics, several states in the federation have recorded several cases of COVID-19 at the entrance of the NYSC camps and these cases have been reported separately, which were included to State's COVID-19 cases. In Abuja, the NYSC coordinator of the Federal Capital Territory, Walida Isa, had confirmed that out of the eight hundred and fifty eight (858) corps members tested before entry into the camp only five persons tested positive of the virus³⁸. The coordinator revealed that the five prospective corps members who tested positive of the pandemic were ferried away to the NCDC isolation centre for treatment³⁹.Also, Kano State NYSC Coordinator, Aisha Tata, confirmed the infection of two prospective corps members out of the eight hundred and twenty six (826) tested⁴⁰.It is important to state here at this moment that even though there are reports of prospective corps members testing positive to the virus in most camps of the States, it nonetheless explained the negative media reportage of the pandemic about the NYSC, which reports suggested that most of the infections were contracted in camps, hence, creating panic.

³⁶News Agency of Nigeria, "731 Batch B NYSC Members Test Positive for COVID-19", www.t.guardian.ng, January 5, 2021.

³⁷ News Agency of Nigeria, "731 Batch B NYSC Members Test Positive for COVID-19" ... 2020.

³⁸S. Toromade, "5 Prospective Corps Members Test Positive for COVID-19 in Abuja", www.pulse.ng, 16th of November 2020.

³⁹S. Toromade, "5 Prospective Corps Members Test Positive for COVID-19 in Abuja" ... 2020.

⁴⁰S. Toromade, "5 Prospective Corps Members Test Positive for COVID-19 in Abuja" ... 2020.

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A case in point could be seen from cases recorded in Cross River and Kano States respectively. In Cross River State, there were reports of 13 prospective corps members who tested positive to the dreaded COVID-19 pandemic⁴¹. The Commissioner for Health in Cross River State, Dr. Betta Edu, claimed that the cause of the high cases of COVID-19 recorded in the State was because of the in flocks of corps members in the State who came for the NYSC orientation course and “about 13 of them were positive cases”⁴². These reports of the media and statement of the Cross River State’s Health Commissioner suggested that the corps members contracted the virus in the orientation camp without stating the details of the COVID-19 guidelines, in which every prospective corps members must fulfill before being admitted into the camp. The NYSC’s reaction to this was that the claims made by the media and Cross River State Government on the COVID-19 infection on corps members were completely false. A statement from the NYSC’s Secretariat in the State reads;

Management wishes to assert that at present, no registered 2020 Batch B Stream II corps member in Cross River is COVID-19 positive... all prospective corps members for the ongoing programme underwent COVID-19 test conducted by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), which is a condition for admission into any of the 37 camps in the country.⁴³

This statement also applies to the situation of Kano State where one the members of staff of the NYSC was alleged to have contacted the virus inside the camp but other reports showed that the incident actually took place at the entrance of the camp where anybody who wants to

⁴¹C. Ukpong, “13 Corp Members Test Positive to COVID-19 at NYSC Camps”, www.premiumtimes.com, January 25, 2021.

⁴²C. Ukpong, “NYSC Reacts to Report of 13 Corps Members Testing Positive to COVID-19”, www.premiumtimesng.com, 26 January 2021.

⁴³C. Ukpong, “NYSC Reacts to Report of 13 Corps Members Testing Positive to COVID-19”... 2020.

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enter camp must undergo the COVID-19 RDT Test. The outcome of the test result determines the next action to be taken by camp officials and the NCDC. It is within the COVID-19 guidelines of the NYSC/NCDC, which states that members found with the virus are to be transferred to isolation centre of the state projected for orientation camp. Thus, the denials of the NYSC officials on COVID-19 infection of Batch B Stream II corps members realigned the fact that it is only prospective corps members that could be said for sure to have contracted the virus and not those who scaled through the RDT test who were admitted into the orientation camp. Even those prospective Corps members who tested positive were registered to continue their services after treatment.

The NYSC Management of COVID-19 in Orientation Camps

A core objective of the NYSC scheme, according to the NYSC Act, is to develop a sense of corporate and common destiny of the people of Nigeria⁴⁴. This call became evident of the scheme, when the national health sector witness the outbreak of COVID-19, the NYSC DG instructed all NYSC state coordinators against the involvement of medical corps members in isolation centers but must remain in their various PPAs in helping government's response team against the spread of the pandemic⁴⁵. This became manifest in the productive capacity of corps members in the States of the federation. For instance, the NYSC became the first Government organization to engage in the production of COVID-19 protective equipment, especially the manufacturing of Sanitizers, Face Masks, Face Shields, and Automated Hand Sanitisers, among others. Thus, the management of the scheme in the course of the COVID-19 lockdown earned the call for the resumption of Orientation Course of the NYSC by the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 Pandemic.

⁴⁴A.K Amos, "Continuity and Progress Amidst a Pandemic" *NYSC Bulletin*, 2020.

⁴⁵Interviews with Bello Ballama, NYSC Coordinator Kaduna State, State Secretariat, 50+, February 18, 2021.

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However, the resumption of NYSC camp activities did not come without conditions for the scheme's adherence to COVID-19 protocols. It was at this instance that the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in discussion with the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and NCDC developed guidelines to promote safe conduct of the 2020/2021 NYSC orientation camp exercises in all the camps around the country⁴⁶. Testing of corps members, staff of the scheme and any other visitors intending to enter the camp became core to the guidelines set by the PTF/NCDC and adopted by the NYSC management. The guidelines include:

1. Increasing of the numbers of camps in each state of the federation so as to reducing the numbers of corps members in each camp.
2. Fumigation and decontamination of orientation camps.
3. Physical distancing, hand washing, constant use of facemasks and proper hygiene in camps must be adhered to.
4. Compulsory temperature check.
5. All corps members must fill in the COVID-19 testing self-reporting form before downloading call up letters.
6. Display of Infection Prevention Control reminders and communication materials in every part of the camp.
7. Hand wash basins and sanitisers stations will be set up across strategic locations in the camp.⁴⁷

The committee responsible to ensuring the readiness of orientation camps around the country was the PTF's Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC), which went round the camps in the 36 States of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to certify the

⁴⁶NCDC, "Guidelines on 2020 National Youth Services Corps (NYSC) Orientation Camp Activities", www.ncdc.gov.ng, retrieved 6th of March 2021.

⁴⁷NCDC, "Guidelines on 2020 National Youth Services Corps (NYSC) Orientation Camp Activities" ... 2021.

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readiness of the NYSC.⁴⁸ in the conduct of its Orientation Course. The committee worked with the NYSC and Health Officials of States to make sure facilities in orientation camps across the country were ready. The required camp facilities, include:

- a. COVID-19 Sample Collection Sites;
- b. At least an Ambulance for each camp;
- c. Constant water supply and hand washing sites;
- d. Adequate and well-spaced beds.⁴⁹

In preparation, the NYSC organized a pre-orientation workshop for the Batch 'B' 2020 Orientation Course, which was held in Jos on the 5th of November 2020, the Director General delivered a lecture on "Evolving a Dynamic Operational Strategy in the Management of Camps in the Context of COVID-19"⁵⁰, and stated the readiness of the scheme to conduct the orientation course. He confirmed that since "the outbreak of the virus in the country, the scheme did not record any case among corps members or staff"⁵¹. He further assured that the "management is committed to ensuring that no camp records outbreak of the virus... our approach to the conduct of the forthcoming orientation course will focus on proper induction of corps members... with equal attention to the approved safety protocols"⁵².

⁴⁸State House, "PTF Certifies NYSC Orientation Camps COVID-19 Compliant", www.statehouse.gov.ng/ptf-certifies-nysc-orientation, 10 November 2020.

⁴⁹State House, "PTF Certifies NYSC Orientation Camps COVID-19 Compliant"... 2020

⁵⁰Yakubu Ibrahim, "Evolving a Dynamic Operational Strategy in the Management of Camps in the Context of COVID-19", a Lecture Delivered in a 2020 Batch 'B' Pre-Orientation Workshop Held in Jos, 5th of November, 2020.

⁵¹Yakubu Ibrahim, "Evolving a Dynamic Operational Strategy in the Management of Camps in the Context of COVID-19" ... 2020.

⁵²Yakubu Ibrahim, "Evolving a Dynamic Operational Strategy in the Management of Camps in the Context of COVID-19" ... 2020.

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The NYSC camps had testing centers at the gate leading to the camp, where people entering are being tested for COVID-19 Pandemic. The various State coordinators, including the DG subjected themselves to testing before entering any of the Orientation camp. The NCDC provided testing facilities and testing kits to NYSC, particularly the Kaduna State coordinator exclaimed that they had leftovers of over 3000 kits for testing of upcoming corps members in camp⁵³. Before one entered the camp, he or she must be tested and once found with COVID-19, the patient won't be allowed into the camp and such person will be transferred to the State Isolation Center. The scheme in Kaduna State used Durban Hotel as isolation center for corps members or staff diagnosed with the virus.

There had never been an issue that the NYSC found any COVID19 case in any of the orientation camp, although, some were diagnosed outside the camp, those found without the virus were allowed into the camp, while corps members, staff and visitors, tested and found with the virus were transferred to isolation center. Nobody was allowed into the camp without testing. Even the Chief Judge of Kaduna State when he came to administer the oath, together with his entourage were subjected to testing, while the cars were decontaminated. The oath papers were also decontaminated at the point of entry. Equally instructive to note is the fact that the DG went round orientation camps and any camp he entered, everybody was tested including him. From Kaduna to Zamfara Camps, which is about 4hours drive, the DG and his entourage subjected themselves to testing in both camps. At one point, the Director General complained to the Kaduna State NYSC coordinator that his nose was already hurting and he was advised to rest⁵⁴.

⁵³Interviews with Mr. Isa Wana, NYSC Coordinator Kaduna State, State Secretariat, 50+, February 18, 2021.

⁵⁴Interviews with Mr. Isa Wana, NYSC Coordinator Kaduna State... 2021.

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The NYSC management ensured provision of over 15 washing points for corps members, and these were placed at the front of the camp, long washing bales where corps members washed their hands. In Kaduna, a total of 27 bales for washing of hands were provided, and corps members through the sponsorship of the Scheme constructed these washing bales. Thus, also, the Presidential Special Taskforce was impressed after the automated hand washing machine was brought before it. The corps members who did these projects were rewarded.⁵⁵ The camps were filled with innovations of the corps members in which this painstaking equipment were used to service corps members and staff of the NYSC scheme during orientation camps.

The success of orientation camps across the country was due mainly to the leadership of the Director-General, Brig. Gen, Shuaibu Ibrahim, and also the management of the scheme, particularly the various state coordinators. This was also achieved through the DG's insistence on the State coordinators on the need to excel in the activities of the scheme.

The management of the Kaduna State orientation exercises/camp and corps members' contribution to the fight against the spread of the virus in the State earned the NYSC State Secretariat a letter of commendation. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the Federal Government offered 110 ex-corps members who served meritoriously automatic employment and scholarship up to PhD if they wish to further their education⁵⁶. This feat was made possible through the proactive and assiduous leadership quality of the Director-General, Brig. Gen. Shuaibu Ibrahim.

⁵⁵O.A Ayobami, "Towards National Development in Post-Covid-19 Era", *Osun Kopa*, Batch 'C', 2021.

⁵⁶State House, "President Buhari Offered Automatic Employment, Scholarship to 110 Ex-Corps Members", www.statehouse.gov.com, February 11, 2021.

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Casualty

The scheme did not record much casualty, but for the case in Kano where an official was found with the virus at the point of entry, but was transferred to isolation center where he later died. The death of this very senior official drew media attention, with reports suggesting that the Resident Officer died in the camp but the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) denied this narrative through its press release which claimed that the death did not occur anywhere near the camp but at the Isolation center. The Director General, Brig. General Shuaibu Ibrahim, in an interview session with members of the Nigerian press, had noted that there was no panic anywhere, and this was only a media creation⁵⁷. For the deceased, a Resident Officer posted to Kano did not have access to the camp and was discovered to have the virus at the point of entry and thereafter, he was moved to isolation center.

The Vanguard Newspaper reported that the patient had COVID-19 in the NYSC camp, which the scheme claimed that the story was misleading and that before anybody enters the camp, such a person must be tested outside the camp and once he or she is tested positive; the person would be immediately referred to isolation center. There had never been any issue that the NYSC found any COVID-19 case in the camp. even though those diagnosed outside the camp and found with the virus were taken to isolation center.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic no doubt affected structural arrangements of most institutions and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as an institution was not left out, such that the outbreak of the virus almost cost its existence but for the proactive leadership of the scheme, the NYSC programme was salvaged. As it was in the Ebola Virus Disease

⁵⁷Prnigeria, "COVID-19: NYSC Clears the Air Over the Death of Staff in Kano", www.prnigeria.com, February 3, 2021.

⁵⁸Interviews with Mr. Bello Ballama, NYSC Coordinator Kaduna State... 2021.

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(EVD) era in 2014, the scheme was able to galvanize its members to respond to the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, such that the scheme was not at the receiving end rather contributed to the nation's fight against the spread of the virus.

The study established that the leadership of Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim, and his proper coordination of the various NYSC State Secretariats reduced the infection rates of the virus among corps members. The infection rate of the COVID-19 pandemic in the camp was about 2.1% of the total sample size, which turned out positive of the deadly virus. This was mainly achieved on three basic facts, which includes; suspension of camp activities, suspending biometric registration and the proper management of Orientation Courses. The study finally established that the management of camp activities around states of the federation lowered the casualty received during the reopening of orientation camps.

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**COVID-19 and Batch 'A' Corps Members:
Towards an Assessment**

Jack Jeremiah

Introduction

The Corona virus has had a significant global impact to the point of bringing the whole world to a standpoint. It is of no denial that the virus is a life threatening one that has affected the human race in recent times, it has brought in an era which would hardly be forgotten down the line of history. The Corona virus first attacks the respiratory system and characterize by the symptoms of frequent and painful coughs. The first place the virus was first noticed was in China which in-turn spread to other parts of the world in no time. The emergence and spread of

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this virus had raised several issues like how the world was never prepared for instances such as the corona virus and how to effectively curb the rapid spread of the virus.

The dangers posed by this virus is like no other seen since the inception of the human race because it is perhaps potent and lethal than any of its predecessors seeing that there is yet no medical curing agent for it, although clinical vaccines have been produced to help curb the transmission and spread; the new strand of Covid-19 appears to be more deadly.

Consequently, various measures known as Covid-19 protocols were put in place by the World Health Organization (WHO) to curtail the spread of the virus as its mechanism of transmission is humans. Covering of the eyes, mouth and eyes with face shield/nose masks, washing of hands regularly with antiseptic hand wash, use of sanitizers, maintaining 2 meters social distancing, self-isolation and quarantine are some of the measures that the world has taken to attend to this pandemic. In an unprecedented manner that the world has never experienced before, the pandemic brought nations; not exempting even the giant economies to a complete standstill and not without devastating increase in the numbers of casualty and unprecedented impact on all aspects of society.

The nature of the spread and effect of the virus in Nigeria was no different from other places in the world. In Nigeria, the first recorded case of the virus was on February 27th 2020 followed by the second case on 9th March, 2020. Subsequently, the Nigerian government had reported several cases of those infected by the virus in their thousands. In response, the Federal Government put up measures to curb the spread of the virus. one of such measures was the total lockdown of the country to restrict movements and so stop the spread of the virus from another person to the other. In other measures, they also quarantine individuals who came in contacts with those tested positives of the

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virus and also individuals already having the virus in their body systems. The shutdown of the country affected almost every sector of the government including the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC) which is an institution responsible for conducting large gatherings in the form of its corps members and staff. Prior to the announcement of the lockdown, the NYSC suspended its on-going orientation camping exercise of the Batch A- Stream 1 on the 18th of March 2020 barely one weeks into the program.

This study therefore tends to interrogate the impact of the corona virus on the NYSC Batch A corps members who were in camp for a week before the abrupt interruption and subsequent closure of the camp and all its activities due to the spread of the corona virus coupled with precaution measures as per the welfare of the corps members.

Government Preparedness and Response to COVID-19 in Nigeria

From the onset of the corona virus, Nigeria had been identified as one of the top countries with the high possibility of the importation of the virus, this is because of the close ties she shares with China where the first case of the virus was found. Nonetheless, even before the emergence of the virus, the WHO had advised developing countries especially in Africa to develop a system where it would be possible for the early detection and subsequent combat of any threatening virus such as the corona virus. This action would also help in reducing the adverse impact of any virus to overwhelm their health systems.

In the case of Nigeria before the advent of the virus into the country, it had been making efforts to prepare for any eventuality if perhaps the virus should be imported into the country, this effort was done through the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC). The federal government had made efforts to increase its capacity to halt the spread of the virus through various response strategies and also strengthen its

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surveillance prowess to be able to identify any form of the disease at all the entry points into the country especially in the airports.¹

However, with the efforts and measures undertaken by the government of Nigeria to keep out the virus from spreading into the country, there was still numerous cases of corona virus in the country. The first index case was an Italian who traveled from Italy-one of the countries much affected by the virus-and into Nigeria. To even make the matter worst, the individual upon arrival had visited several states in the country before there was any visible symptoms of the virus. This event had shown that the efforts and measures put in place by the government was not effective enough is putting a wall around the spread of the virus into the country. On detection of the index case, a multi-sectoral NCDC led-Emergency Operation Centers (EOC) was step-up in 22 of 36 states of the federation, to supervise the response to COVID-19 nationally. There was rapid response team deployed by NCDC to ensure contact tracing in States like Lagos, Ogun and FCT which were the epicenter of the outbreak.²

As time went on, the Federal Government inaugurated the Presidential task Force (PTF) in dealing with the virus. The team was presided upon by the Federal Government Secretary in person of Boss Mustapha. Due to the establishment of PTF, all flights from the strongholds of those infected by the virus, numbering about 13 countries were suspended. However, before this move was made, more Nigerians were already infected with the virus.³ Experts from Nigeria were among those trained from February 6th to 8th 2020, by the African Centre for Disease

¹ NCDC. “COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria,” 2020. Retrieved from:
<https://ncdc.gov.ng/diseases/sitreps>

²A Jimoh, et al. “Coronavirus Outbreak in Nigeria; Burden and Socio-medical Response During the First 100 Days,” *International Journal of Infectious Disease*, Vol 98,(2020): 218-224

³A Jimoh, et al. “Coronavirus Outbreak in Nigeria; Burden and Socio-medical Response During the First 100 Days,”

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Control (Africa CDC), on COVID-19 diagnosis using Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)⁴. Therefore, the PCR was used for the COVID-19 test prior to the approval of Antigen (Ag) based Rapid Diagnostic Test by the NCDC.

On September 2020, WHO announced the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) of two Ag RDTs. A validation exercise of the RDT was carried out by NCDC in synergy with other relevant stakeholders in Nigeria⁵. The validation was held at NYSC camp with showed that RDT attain the minimal standard for sensitivity and specificity of COVID-19 diagnostic test, thus it was recommended for use primarily in places like schools and hospitals for testing patients with COVID-19 symptoms. RDT proved to be faster and save effective when compared to PCR method, however Nigeria does not have adequate testing facilities to test its huge populace for COVID-19.⁶

In addition to the COVID-19 preparedness strategy, the polio infrastructure a programme designed to eradicate polio in Nigeria was adopted. The structure brought on board its technical expertise, logical capacity, human resources, community network and disease surveillance experience to help combat the spread of the COVID-19⁷. The polio infrastructure was brought on board due to the significant role it played in combating the EVD outbreak. The EOCs coordinating

⁴ Africa CDC. "Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Global Epidemic," Accessed February 29, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://africaC.D.C.org/disease-outbreak/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-global-epidemic-11-february-2020/>

⁵ NCDC. "NCDC Publish New Guideline on Use of Approved Rapid Diagnostic Test Kit In Congregate Settings." NCDC, January, 18 2021. <https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/286/ncdc-publishes-new-guidance-on-use-of-approved-rapid-diagnostic-test-kits-in-congregate-settings>

⁶ U.A Madubuike et al, "A Perspective on Nigeria's Preparedness, Response and Challenges to Mitigating the Spread of COVID-19" *Challenges*,(2020): 1-15.

⁷ WHO. "Nigeria's Polio Infrastructure Bolster COVID-19 Response", May 8, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.afro.who.int/news/nigerias-polioinfrastructure-bolster-covid-19-response>

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the outbreak response in each state are modeled under six functional units namely: Point of entry, epidemiology and surveillance, risk communication, management and communication, case management, and laboratory services.

Drawing lessons from the Ebola Virus Pandemic, the NCDC strengthened their human resources and equipped the National Reference Laboratory with Personal Protection Equipments (PPEs) and diagnostic equipments required for testing for the epidemic-prone pathogens⁸. A commendable effort by the NCDC was setting up a laboratory diagnostic test for SAR-CoV-2 within 48 hours of isolating the index case of COVID-19⁹, however it was still limited to symptomatic cases. NCDC in a bid to intensify its effort in responding to the outbreak, there was a change in their testing strategies which lead to the establishment of 112 public and private testing laboratories across all states and FCT. In addition 74 of these are public laboratories that provide free COVID-19 testing to the general public¹⁰, however a country with a population of >200,000,000 people, only 1,544,008 sample has been tested as at March 3, 2021¹¹. Despite government effort to control the spread of the virus, on March 3, 2021 the country has so far recorded 156,496 confirm cases with 135,136 discharged cases, 19,437 active cases and 1,923 deaths¹².

The Covid-19 Pandemic and the NYSC Scheme

The Covid-19 virulent disease that has ravaged the world is a rapidly evolving situation and new information about the virus is still emerging. The disease is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The most common symptoms include flu-

⁸ WHO, Nigeria’s polio Infrastructure Bolster.

⁹ NCDC. “First case of Coronavirus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria.

¹⁰ NCDC, Publish New Guideline on use of Approved Rapid Diagnostic Test Kit.

¹¹ Madubuike, A Perspective on Nigeria’s Preparedness, Response and Challenges to Mitigating the Spread of COVID-19.

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like symptoms such as fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing. Symptoms can also include chills and repeated shaking, muscle pain, headache, sore throat and loss of sense of taste or smell. Symptoms typically appear within 2 days to 14 days after exposure.¹³

The overwhelming of the health system of the world led the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare this virus a public health emergency in January 30, 2020. Prior to that, the first outbreak of the virus was recorded to have started in Wuhan China on December 8 of 2019 and by January 2020 several European countries and America had already started reporting cases of the spread of the pandemic.¹⁴

Back in Nigeria, in line with the declaration by WHO and its categorization of Nigeria as one of the 13th high-risk African countries with respect to the spread of the virus, the Corona virus Preparedness Group was constituted on January. The first case of Covid-19 brought in by an Italian citizen was reported on February 27 and on 9 March 2020 a second case was reported in Ogun of a citizen who was in contact with the Italian citizen.¹⁵ And thus began the journey of the spread of Covid-19 in the country with the situation developing with more cases of infections and death on a gradual rise with Lagos being the epicenter of the pandemic in Nigeria. The already high number of Covid-19 cases in China, the epicenter of the virus at that time and the growing rate of infections in Europe and America, in addition to some

¹³www.ncdc.gov.ng See also, Nigeria General Health Risks: Corona virus Covid-19, <https://www.iamat.org/country/nigeria/risk/coronaviruses> Accessed 20th February, 2021.

¹⁴www.covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/cn Accessed February 20th, 2021.

¹⁵ First Case of Corona Virus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria, ncdc.gov.ng/news/227/first-case-of-corona-virus-disease-confirmed-in-nigeria Accessed February 19th, 2021.

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international flights still operating within the period before the ban made Nigeria particularly susceptible.¹⁶

Following the steps of other nations and the WHO, a ban was placed on flights from countries with increased rate of transmission and later compulsory lock down was enforced by the federal government on March 30, 2020 in three states of the federation; Lagos, Ogun and Abuja while other states gradually followed suit as the months progressed. Borders were shut, interstate travel banned, offices, schools, markets, hotels and services classified as non-essentials were closed.¹⁷ Applaudable was the fact that the NYSC had earlier shut down their orientation camps on the 18th of March thereby disrupting the orientation of the 2020 Batch-A Stream-1 across the federation a week into the exercise and discharged them to their various places of primary assignment.

As part of the necessary steps in curtailing the spread of the virus, isolation centres were opened in various parts of the country. Commendable was the swift compliance of the NYSC scheme to the presidential directive to release its orientation camp facilities nationwide to serve as isolation centres and its immediate arrangement for the provision of relevant facilities to enhance effective usage of the camps were made.¹⁸ Furthermore, the scheme in consonance with its corps members joined in the fight against covid-19 as corps medical teams of doctors, nurses and laboratory scientists across the federation joined their counterparts and other health professionals in the frontline, providing services in various health

¹⁶www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/14/nigeria-protect-most-vulnerable-covid-19-responses. See also: The First 90 Days: How has Nigeria responded to the COVID-19 Outbreak?, <https://nigeriahealthwatch.medium.com/>

¹⁷ The First 90 Days: How has Nigeria responded to the COVID-19 Outbreak?, <https://nigeriahealthwatch.medium.com/>

¹⁸ Covid-19:NYSC Corps Members Sustain Campaigns against the Pandemic, <https://prnigeria.com/2020/04/07/covid-nysc-corps-sustain-campaigns> see also

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facilities and working with some NGO's to test patients.¹⁹ Other corps members made impact through the SAED program by the mass production and donation of face masks, antiseptic liquid soaps and hand sanitizers. They equally fabricated and donated automatic and foot-operated water, liquid soaps and hand sanitizing dispensers as well as disinfection as well as disinfection chambers in several states for their fellow corps members, state government and their host communities.²⁰

Another important role of the scheme was visible through corps members who engaged in sensitization campaigns through radio, television and other social media outlets. They became vanguards of the lockdown and adherence to the Covid-19 rules and protocols. Besides, most of the central activities for serving corps members such as the monthly signing of clearance, weekly and monthly Community Development Service (CDS) were suspended; and also passing out parade (POP) reduced to clearance as a result of the pandemic and lockdown. The NYSC orientation exercise was also suspended to prevent the risk of transmission of the disease through inter-state travels.²¹

With the resumption of camp activities in late 2020 after the lock down had been eased, there have been visible effects of Covid-19 on the scheme and its programs. The gradual easing of the lockdown and the resumption of socio-economic, educational and political activities led the NYSC to reopen their orientation camps for its corps members and the NYSC community. Working in conjunction with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the NYSC put in place certain measures to prevent infections and early identification of outbreaks in the various orientation camps across the federation. Such measures included the

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fumigation of orientation camps nation-wide to ensure environmental hygiene, the use of rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) approved by WHO to screen its members, a National Guideline detailing the camp activities was developed to keep prospective corps members informed on vital measures to help in reducing the risk of infection amongst many others.²²

With the above measures set in place, the NYSC with approval from the Federal Government went further in November to mobilize 66,000 prospective corps members to camps in different parts of the state amidst rising fears of the spread of the virus, although, the Director General assured Nigerians that the scheme has put in place essential measures endorsed by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in all orientation Camps in-line with the protocols for the safety of corps members.²³ Sources confirmed that the NYSC as an organization and a vast community responsible for hosting large number of persons yearly took measures to ensure its activities are carried out successfully in the face of Covid-19 by ensuring medical scrutiny of its corps members and staffs at its orientation camps, isolating and reporting of all suspected case, general adherence to the Covid-19 protocols within and outside camps.²⁴

Evidently, the NYSC as a critical stakeholder in the project Nigeria, the proactive steps adopted by the scheme in response to the contemporary global health challenge posed by Covid-19 will remain a

²² Covid-19: Safe Re-opening of NYSC Orientation Camp in Nigeria,
<https://ncdc.gov.ng/reports/282/2020-october-week-43> Accessed 24 February 2021.

²³ Luminous Jannamike, “NYSC Deploys 66,000 Corps Members for Orientation Exercise Tuesday”,
www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2020/11/nysc-deploys-66,000-corps-members-for-orientation-exercise-tuesday/amp/ Accessed February 18, 2021.

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worthwhile agenda in the archives as it has secured its place in the annals of the nation's development.

Impact of COVID-19 on Batch A 2020 Corps Members

The Corona virus has had an adverse impact on the Batch A Corps Members. One of such impacts was the abrupt closure of all camp activities after just one week of camp commencement.²⁵ The orientation camp is designed to equip corps members with para-military skills, more so, it is designed to give corps members a proper understanding of the scheme's goals and ensure that they internalize its ideals. It is also designed to familiarize them with their new environment, prepare them for their unique roles during the service year as well as to instill discipline, inculcate the spirit of national consciousness and promote a sense of collective responsibility and spirit de corps among all members. Last but not the least, it is designed to give corps members adequate physical and mental training and equip them with practical, social and leadership skills to enable them meet the varied challenges of the service year. The general orientation is usually the most rigorous, but also to some extent, the most exciting aspect of the camp. The orientation involves military drills and parades, physical education and activities, Man O' War type leadership and citizenship education, training and symposia on various national issues, as well as educative discussions on the history, culture, customs, government and economy of the state to which the corps members are deployed. For the purpose of these lectures and symposia, speakers are drawn from all sectors of the society and all walks of life.²⁶

With the abrupt closure of the NYSC camp, the Batch A corps members were not able to retain the privilege of getting some of these valuable

²⁵ Ruth Okwumbu, "NYSC's Orientation suspension only a precautionary measure – DG, NYSC", Nairametrics, March 18, 2020

²⁶ Enegwea G, and Umoden G, NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service, (Lagos: Gabumo Publishing Company LTD, 1993).

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training as they only had a week in camp. Some of the training like the military drills which was supposed to help them go through the tussle of their service year after the camp were not completed due the abrupt end of the NYSC camp as a result of the corona virus. One of such training was the physical and mental training which was done to equip them to be able to keep up with their challenges especially those that were posted in the rural areas. Without those trainings, it would be somewhat a difficult undertaken for the corps members to cope with that kind of an environment especially the hostile ones as compared to where they come from. More so, there are series of lectures which are strategically spread within the three weeks of the compulsory camp exercise that is supposed to orient the corps members on what is expected of them, and a proper understanding of what is envisaged of them during their one-year service time.

The general orientation also involves an entrepreneurship development programme aimed at teaching simple business management skills. The goal of the programme is to equip the corps members with the basic skills they needs to set up a business ventures at the end of the service year. This programme is called the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED).²⁷ The significance of the SAED programme to Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is a very huge avenue for the development of entrepreneurship among the youths in Nigeria and eventually the reduction of unemployment in the growing face of unemployment rate in the country. The scheme taps into the creative, innovative and appreciative nature of several individuals that graduate from across the world. Considerable and stable pool of beneficiaries are available to tap from the opportunity of the NYSC SAED scheme. This ensures that as more young people graduate, they are immediately connected to the entrepreneurial development opportunities provided by NYSC.

²⁷National Youth Service Corp Year Book, 2018 Edition.

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However, regardless of how important the SAED training is, the 2020 Batch A set of NYSC corps members were not able to enjoy the privilege of the numerous benefits of SAED, this is directly as a result of the sudden closure of the NYSC orientation camp and all its activities. Normally, SAED lectures start immediately after one week following corps members arrival to the orientation camp. However, the week to which the Batch A corps members were supposed to start on the SAED training was the week the NYSC authorities decided to cut the NYSC orientation camp nationwide. That is to say, there is a gap left in the amount of youths that were able to access this entrepreneurship training, this in turn has had an undesirable impact on the efforts towards youth empowerment in Nigeria. This is because if the youths are empowered, it creates an avenue where the skills of the youths would be employed and geared towards nation-building and development thus acting as an 'add-on' to the economic prowess of any country. This means that most of the youths in the Batch A 2020 set of corps members without pre-NYSC entrepreneurship training would find it hard to be self-employed. This would not be emboldening in the efforts towards reducing unemployment in the country. The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is always on the increase associated with a high rate of poverty and crime.²⁸ The youths constitute some two-thirds of the country's population making them the critical mass of the instrument of national development. Some data such as the Unemployment Survey Report²⁹ and National Bureau of Statistics³⁰ observe that, as at 2018 the average Nigerian youth unemployment rate was an appalling 40.8%.

²⁸ Lawanson O. *High Rate of Unemployment in Nigeria. The Consequence of Human Research Management*. A Paper delivered in EU Society of Help, Rome, Italy. 2007, p.43

²⁹ Unemployment Survey Report. Survey Report. Ministry of Labour and Productivity, Abuja. 2019, pp. 2-8

³⁰ National Bureau of Statistics. Social Statistics in Nigeria, Abuja; the NBS Publication. 2020

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Furthermore, the community development service (CDS) and the Place of primary assignment (PPA)are the two most important and demanding aspects of the entire national service. The importance of Community service through the corps members cannot be overemphasized, more so, the importance of community service in contemporary Nigeria cannot be over-stated. To transform the community into fully participatory and egalitarian society, the scheme capitalized on the abundant human resource and the intellectual capacity of vibrant Nigerian youth to ensure that community service plays a major role in its operations. As a cardinal programme of the NYSC, Community Development Service CDS is the ideal of the scheme; corps members are encouraged to actively participate in this activity in conjunction with local communities to promote and execute development projects thereby facilitating and strengthening self-help projects within these communities. However, it will be recalled that the orientation programme was suspended in March, one week into the 2020 batch A stream one course following the outbreak of the novel Corona virus. All the NYSC camps across the country were shut as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. And as a result, all the activities of the corps members with regards to their community development service and their obligations at their various Places of Primary Assignment (PPA) was abruptly halted and restricted. This means that the Batch A corps members which were supposed to serve as a source of human and manpower to the betterment of the community they found themselves in through the CDS and PPA were somewhat not available. NYSC since its establishment has served as an important source of skilled manpower for many states, supplying qualitative labor regularly to both the public and private sectors of the economy. However, the corps members were to some extent very much involved and further embarked on measures that would help curb the challenges that came as an antecedent of the corona virus. One of those efforts are the ones embarked on by the NYSC health sector which was actively providing medical assistance throughout the period of the

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corona virus. The health sector in this case is made up of Medical Doctors, Pharmacists, Lab Scientists, and Nurses, which operates a programme called “Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers” (HIRD)³¹, an initiative established in 2015.³² Their effort involves sensitizing mostly core rural dwellers on disease prevention, providing first aid, monitoring of cases and providing appropriate referral when necessary. The medical lab scientists and the Pharmacists, particularly the medical lab scientists were of enormous assistance to the Nigerian Health Service. They were at the forefront of the Covid-19 team, and in most cases, they were exposed to the virus. In Kaduna State, Nasir el-Rufai drafted some members of the NYSC medical team to the State COVID-19 taskforce set up by the State government.³³

Furthermore, the corps members were also involved in different innovations to tackle the spread of the corona virus. Such innovations include but not limited to; 1) the construction of foot lever hand washing water dispenser by some corps members in Kwara state 2) provided covid-19 protective items in almost every state of the country where corps members are found 3) provided free palliatives and free medicare for IDP's in Borno State and many more of such efforts. They were also at different centers collecting samples and diagnosing suspected patients of the virus. The medical doctors were not allowed to participate in Isolation Centers but were involved in providing healthcare service during the COVID-19 lockdown.³⁴

³¹ NYSC, “National Youth Service Corps Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers - Profile”, www.nysc.gov.ng, Retrieved February 23/02/2021.

³² The Nation, “NYSC begins Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers in Ogun”, www.thenationonlineng.net, October 12, 2017.

³⁴ News Agency of Nigeria, “NYSC Lauds Corps Medical Personnel on Fight against COVID-19”, Guardian Newspaper, 14 February 2021 see also Osun Kopa, “COVID-19: NYSC Donates Sanitisers, Facemask”

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Conclusion

The advent of the corona virus has been of adverse effect worldwide. Nigeria of course had had its own share in regards to the effects that comes as an antecedent of the spread of the corona virus. The impact of the corona virus had touched every sphere and sector of the Nigerian community. One of those is the NYSC scheme.

The NYSC scheme had to be put on hold not until the spread and effects of the virus had died down. The batch that was at camp when the virus got into the country was the NYSC 2020 batch A who had to be withdrawn after one week at camp.

The study revealed that the abrupt stoppage of the NYSC camp had been on the bad side to the Corp members who were not able to enjoy the privileges that come with the complete stay of three weeks in the camp. Some of these are the SAED training to make them readily self-employed and the military drills coupled with lectures designed to prepare them to be effective when they eventually got posted to their various places of primary assignment. However, the NYSC Management set machinery to ensure the 2020 Batch A corps members were later recalled back in batches to undergo the skills acquisition training on camp alongside subsequent batches. This well-designed strategy worked in giving equal access to the affected corps members to be fully sensitized on the skills acquisition and entrepreneurship programme.

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National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Covid-19 and Prospective Corps Members' Mobilization

Jibunor Udoka Victor

Introduction

In the league of infectious diseases, a pandemic rank above all and is the worst-case scenario. The world had been plagued by several other deadly viruses ranging from the Bubonic plague, Leprosy, Malaria, Choler and small pox to name a few. However, in March 2020 when it became apparent that the world was hit by a new virus, she grappled with the speed and ease at which people were affected, the world was caught half dressed and ill-prepared for what lied in her offing; the only logical action to halt the spread of the virus was to pull the plug.

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Corona virus disease is a severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China.¹ It was initially reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency². On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic³. Illness caused by SARS-CoV-2 was termed COVID-19 by the WHO, the acronym derived from "coronavirus disease 2019."

COVID - 19 is the deadly virus that nearly locked down the entire universe. It claimed several millions of lives worldwide. Africa is one of the continents least affected and so was Nigeria. Initially when there was absence of a vaccine to correctly mitigate the global levels of deaths due to the COVID-19 outbreak, most nations employed the only tact available to them: enforced a full lockdown and ensured social distancing while advocating the use of face mask and good personal hygiene – frequent washing of hands, use of alcohol-based hand-sanitizers, coughing into elbows and avoid touching one's face. The choice governments had to make was to either keep the economy open and face rising deaths or shutdown the economy and experience a crippling effect.

Once the choice was confirmed, the fate of the world was sealed nothing would remain the same, the choice to save the world meant we embrace the pack of disruptions that came with it. The entire spectrum

¹ CDC. "Novel Coronavirus, Wuhan, China," 2019. Retrieved from:<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>

² Gallegos A. "WHO Declares Public Health Emergency for Novel Coronavirus". Medscape Medical News, July 19, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/924595>

³ Sui-Lee Wee, Donal G. McNeil Jr, Javier C. Hernandez. W.H.O. Declares Global Emergency as Wuhan Coronavirus Spreads. The New York Times, January 30, 2020, Update April 16, 2020. Retrieved from:<https://nyti.ms/2RER70M>

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of human events had been greatly disrupted and forever altered; every sphere of human engagement had been affected. Newer ways of having things done had to be embraced and adopted quickly, this meant the appreciable number of people at public events were drastically reduced.

People had lost loved ones to this monster of a virus that kept mutating, scientist world over had to do in 1 year what normally took them 10 years: Developing a new vaccine from scratch takes considerable time. It depends a lot on how much information is available about the disease itself, how the disease infects people and spreads, and so on. That makes it truly amazing that we already have one authorized vaccine for COVID-19; it speaks volumes about the efforts put into preparing vaccine for the pandemic.^{4,5}

Against the run of play, against the standard procedural patterns for the manufacture of vaccines, the world has one. On the global scale, considering a European nation like France the capital city of Paris, it was reported that at its peak, one Parisian was getting infected with COVID-19 every 30 seconds, while in every 15 minutes there is a Parisian arriving in hospital as a result of the disease according to health minister Olivier Veran.⁶

⁴WHO, “*Vaccines and immunization: What is vaccination?*” December 30, 2020, updated February 22, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/vaccines-and-immunization-what-is-vaccination>?adgroupsurvey=%7badgroupsurvey%7d&gclid=EA1alQobChMI_vqt-feF7wlVyMLVCh2fkQGZEAYASAAEgKxO_D_BwE

⁵Sanofi, “*Manufacturing vaccines is a complex journey,*” Sanofi Integrated Report, 2019

⁶Reuters Staff, “One Parisian infected with COVID-19 every 30 seconds: health minister”, Retrieved from: https://www.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN27J0O0?__twitter_impression=true

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Nigerians have shown very complacent attitude towards SARS-COV 2; they have brandished it a hoax and have basically let their guards down and thrown caution to the wind. With the formation of a vaccine, we can now see light at the end of the very, very long tunnel. It is our responsibility to get to the end safely and unscathed. But, this more than ever depends largely on individual's awareness and strict adherence to guiding protocols.

While there is no way to tell exactly what the full extent of the economic damage from the global COVID-19 novel corona virus pandemic will be, there is widespread agreement among economists that it will have severe negative impacts on the global economy and its already being seen and widely reported; the aviation sector has been worst hit and the one booming sector is finding it difficult to get going as most people would rather have their trainings and meetings over Zoom or cancel a vacation trip until the wind of the virus completely blows over.

Early estimates predicated that, should the virus become a global pandemic, most major economies will lose at least 2.4 percent of the value their gross domestic product (GDP) over 2020, leading economists to already reduce their 2020 forecasts of global economic growth down from around 3.0 percent to 4.5 percent. To put this number in perspective, global GDP was estimated at around 86.6 trillion U.S. dollars in 2019 – meaning that just a 0.4 percent drop in economic growth amounts to almost 3.5 trillion U.S. dollars in lost economic output.

However, these predictions were made prior to COVID-19 becoming a global pandemic, and before the enforcement of widespread restrictions on social contact to stop the spread of the virus (an effort popularly referred to as social distancing). Since the pronunciation of COVID-19 as a pandemic, global stock markets have suffered

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cataclysmic damaging falls due to the outbreak – the market has simply entered a free fall state, the longest streak of the market remaining bearish, Dow Jones reported its largest-ever single day fall of almost 3,000 points on March 16, 2020, dwarfing a previous record of 2,300 points that was set four days earlier. If the global economy were subjected to defibrillators at a voltage of 300KVA, she still would remain comatose and proudly brandish her flatline.⁷

What should probably be listed as one of the wonders of the world is how low the number of COVID-19 cases and fatalities appear to remain comparatively low in Africa than in other world regions, the looming health shock of COVID-19 would have had a disastrous impact on the continent's already strained health systems, and could quickly turn into a social and economic emergency. Beyond health risks, the COVID-19 shock to African economies is coming in three waves:

1. lower trade and investment from China – the factory of the world - in the immediate term;
2. a demand slump associated with the lockdowns in the European Union (EU) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations; and
3. a continental supply shock affecting domestic and intra-African trade.

The pandemic, had it had the kind of damaging effect it had on developed nation on underdeveloped African nations, it would have vigorously shaken off the any gains in the last 15 years from our commodity-driven growth models that had largely failed to create more and better jobs or improved well-being.

Most African governments have put in place measures to ensure strict adherence to social distancing, focusing on border and travel

⁷Statista Research Department "*Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the global economy - Statistics & Facts*," Statista, February 23, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/topics/6139/covid-19-impact-on-the-global-economy/>

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restrictions, closure of hotels, school closures, and bans on large gatherings. South Africa has implemented a 21-day period of full lockdown. Other countries, such as Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, instituted curfews and partial lockdowns and full lockdowns. The crisis has undoubtedly dealt Africa's growth through domestic and external channels a huge blow, with a significant direct impact on the well-being and number of people living in poverty. Recent forecasts projects that Africa will experience a GDP contraction in most countries due to the pandemic in 2020, this would be the first contraction the continent has experienced over a 25 years period. The United Nations estimates that nearly 30 million more people could fall into poverty and there would be a massive proliferation of the number of acutely food-insecure people.⁸

Nigeria is a nation with a huge youth population of unemployed youths and job losses expected due to the negative impact of the COVID-19, combined with lower volumes of exports such as oil, Nigeria's economy is further expected to contract by 6.1% year on year in the second quarter of the year in focus. About 27% of Nigeria's labor force (over 21 million Nigerians) are unemployed. There's also little sign of a quick turnaround in Nigeria's economic woes as the World Bank predicts Africa's most populous country is set for its worst recession in four decades.

The impacts the corona virus pandemic has had on Africa's largest economy is being seen in available data. Nigeria's economy contracted by 6.1% year on year in the second quarter of this year, latest reports from Nigeria's statistics bureau show. The dip follows thirteen quarters of positive but low growth rates. The -6.1% decline is also Nigeria's

⁸OECD, "COVID-19 and Africa: Socio-economic implications and policy responses (oecd.org)," May 7, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-and-africa-socio-economic-implications-and-policy-responses-96e1b282/>

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steepest in the last 10 years. As with most other economies around the world, the sharp drop in Nigeria's GDP growth is largely due to the slowdown in economic activity after the country resorted to a lockdown back in April to curb the spread of the virus.

While the lockdown has since been eased in the wake of its "heavy economic cost to the nation" the continued rise in cases—especially in Lagos, Nigeria's economic hub—means the local economy is yet to fully re-open and gain the necessary traction for full scale re-opening. So far, the country has recorded just over 156,963 cases and 1,939.⁹

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC): A Historical Overview

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is an initiative of the Federal Government of Nigeria through which graduates of tertiary institutions across the country are required to complete a mandatory one-year of service to the nation. As part of this process, graduates are deployed across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory and required to spend three weeks in an orientation camp in their state of deployment.

The National Youth Service Corps is the bridge, the gate and the springboard for the nations teeming youth population whose decision is to forge a career part in the corporate world within the nation and contribute their quota towards national development. During the nascent stage of the pandemic, there were a lot of pandemonium as it remained unclear if the virus was airborne and how long it survived on surfaces, rumour mongers jumped on this gap but for the daily update by the NCDC, it would have been a different tale. The humorous side to the outbreak, was every man was a suspect, so we stopped shaking hands. As a result, people cancelled or postponed trips as the country

⁹Yomi Kazeem, "*How has the coronavirus pandemic affected Nigeria's economy? / World Economic Forum,*" World Economic Forum, August 28, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/africa-largest-economy-worst-contraction-in-a-decade/>)

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entered full lockdown mode. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, it seems like every travel-related decision is a calculus of risk – especially keeping the NYSC orientation camp opened. However, there was good news for fresh graduates around the country itching to get their lives started post NYSC probably after experiencing delays as a result of Academic Staff Union Universities (ASUU) strikes due to their face-off with Government. There is growing consensus that transmission risks are lower outdoors than inside.¹⁰

The vision and mission of the National youth service corps are encapsulated in the words below:

Vision Statement

To develop a sound and result oriented organization that is strongly committed to its set objectives particularly those of national unity and even development. An organization that is well motivated and capable of bringing out the best qualities in our youths and imparting in them the right attitude and values for nation-building. An organization that serves as a catalyst to national development, and a source of pride and fulfilment to its participating graduate youths.

Mission Statement

- a. To build a pragmatic organization that is committed to its set objectives with the ultimate goal of producing future leadership with positive national ethos-Leadership that is vibrant, proud and committed to the unity and even development of the Nigeria State.

¹⁰Kayode Oyero, "COVID-19: NYSC shifts camp reopening date, bans religious gatherings," Punch Newspapers, January 15, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://punchng.com/covid-19-nysc-shifts-camp-reopening-date-bans-religious-gatherings/>

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- b. To be at the fore front of National development efforts, as well as serve as a profitable platform for imparting in our youths' values of nationalism, patriotism, loyalty and accountable leadership.
- c. To raise the moral tone of our youths by giving them opportunity to learn about high ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement.
- d. To develop in our youths' attitude of mind acquired through shared experience, and suitable training which would make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest.
- e. To ensure Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance, a reliable source of economic empowerment and effective participation in nation building.
- f. To develop an organization that is alive to its responsibilities and responsive to the needs of the country.

The objectives of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme are clearly spelt out in Decree No.51 of 16th June 1993 as follows:

- 1. To inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves;
- 2. To raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement;
- 3. To develop in the Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interest;
- 4. To enable Nigerian youths, acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment;
- 5. To contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy;

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6. To develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration;
7. To remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups;
8. To develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.

To achieve this objective, as envisioned by the fathers of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the scheme is set to ensure:

1. The equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilisation of their skills in area of national needs;
2. That as far as possible, youths are assigned to jobs in States other than their States of origin;
3. That such group of youths assigned to work together is as representative of Nigeria as far as possible;
4. That the Nigerian youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of Nigeria;
5. That the Nigerian youths are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences;
6. That members of the service corps are encouraged to seek at the end of their one-year national service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labour and
7. That employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of their States of origin.¹¹

¹¹Emmanuel Onwubiko, “*Lockdown and unlocking of youth’s skills by NYSCOpinion*”, The Guardian Nigeria News, August 18, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://guardian.ng/opinion/lockdown-and-unlocking-of-youths-skills-by-nysc/>

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Any family that had dependents who were engaged in the scheme and trapped in the orientation camp showed great levels of fear, apprehension and concerns for the safety of their children for reasons founded and not far-fetched. Nigerians at all levels had clear and bald disregard for the virus. Law enforcement agents treated the virus like it was no big deal and it was hard to ascertain if they had received any form of orientation from the National Orientation Agency.

However, the hierarchy of the NYSC was spontaneous and responded appropriately on the spur of the moment by working out effective ways to keep the Corps Safe from impending harm by swiftly suspending the camps and by implementing the World Health Organization's protocols and the Nigeria Center for Disease Control's guidelines to beat any outbreak of the COVID-19 in orientation camps. These efforts paid off. This is because, not a single participant of the NYSC was affected by the COVID-19 just as those who were asked to proceed home were mobilized to ensure their safe passage to their families.

The Corps members who had already been deployed in the different States across the country used the period of nation-wide lockdown to positively engage in activities that were aimed at supporting Governments in their locations to manage and contain the COVID-19 spread. The lockdown served as a launchpad to the leadership of the NYSC which was used to unlock the skills and attenuated talents of the youths participating in the scheme in line with the mandates of the NYSC. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that rocked the entire globe in 2020, the NYSC orientation calendar was delayed to prevent further transmission of the disease. However, following the resumption of most socio-economic, political and educational activities across the country, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) worked closely with NYSC authorities to ensure the safe reopening of orientation camps for

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prospective Corps Members and NYSC community such as staff, traders, security etc.

The main objective of this is to strengthen infection prevention control in NYSC camps and promptly identify outbreaks of COVID-19 in camps for treatment. This will involve the use of Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs), approved for use in specific settings by WHO, to screen members of every NYSC orientation camp community as resumption commenced on the 10th of November, 2020. NCDC in collaboration with the Presidential Task Force on CIVID-19 and NYSC, has also developed and published a National Guidelines on 2020 National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Orientation Camp activities detailing critical information to guide corps members during their service year on reducing the risk of infection. Readiness assessments were conducted across NYSC camps to ensure that all camps meet the key performance indicators (KPI's) of COVID-19 preventive measures and are ready for safe opening. In addition, a joint NCDC and NYSC webinar was held with corps members and a media chat with members of the press, to sensitise the public on efforts to ensure the safe reopening of NYSC orientation camps in the context of COVID-19.¹²

A report by the National Economic Sustainability and Recovery Committee studied the situation and made some recommendations where they added, "In a similar context, consideration will be given to suspending the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) orientation camp exercises for at least 24 months, while allowing deployment to places of primary assignment. This will ensure that there is no backlog in the national service placement pipeline." The report was compiled by a team of ministers – Finance, Budget & National Planning, State, Budget and National Planning, Industry Trade & Investment, Labour and Employment, State, Petroleum Resources, Governor, the Central Bank

¹²NCDC, "*COVID-19: Safe reopening of NYSC Orientation Camp in Nigeria*," 2020.
Retrieved from: ncdc.gov.ng

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of Nigeria, Group Managing Director, NNPC and permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office – Secretary and was aimed at recommending changes in different sectors of the country's economy post-COVID-19.

Despite Government's efforts to get the general public to be convinced on the preparedness and mechanisms set in place to ensure compliance, the NYSC has faced heavy backlash due to the increasing cases of COVID-19. The second wave of the pandemic whose transmission rate is faster and appears deadlier than the first has stirred concern that if the orientation camps are allowed to open, the spread will be blown out of control and easily overwhelm Nigeria's fragile healthcare system while revealing her delicate underbelly.

Schools in Lagos have reopened, the epicentre of the pandemic in Nigeria, and Ogun State on Jan. 18 while NYSC orientation camps were equally reopened. Prior to this, the Economic Sustainability Committee led by Vice President Yemi Osinbajo had in June recommended that the immediate focus in the education sector should be to address the disruption caused by the pandemic and ensure social distancing measures at all levels of education. It was also recommended that consideration was to be given to suspending the National Youth Service Corps orientation camp exercises for at least 24 months while allowing deployment to places of primary assignment. This will ensure that there is no backlog in the national service placement pipeline. The whole world knows that increased human interactions leads to an increase in COVID-19 infections. Even in the UK and USA, schools have been re-opened and shut at different times but the key thing is to reduce human interaction as much as possible.¹³

¹³Samuel Nwite, "Amidst Surge in COVID-19 Cases, Nigerian Governments Move to Reopen NYSC Camps, Schools," Tekedia, January 16, 2021. Retrive <https://www.tekedia.com/amidst-surge-in-covid-19-cases-nigerian-governments-move-to-reopen-nysc-camps-schools>.

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The NYSC Programme provides room for networking for young and fresh graduates. The mixing up of individuals bound by common goals for a stipulated period of time could also help you extend your web and circle of influence. It could expose you to new cultures, new ways of doing things and help you understand other religions. It would be recalled that Government's attempt to reopen schools earlier had resulted in infections. There was a report of a secondary school where many students and staff tested positive for the virus in November, which then begs the question; why is the federal government keen on reopening both the schools and NYSC orientation camps?

Apparently not a decision he can change, the Director General of Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Dr. Chikwe Ihekweazu has said that the government could not stop all activities in order to quell the pandemic. He suggested that authorities must find innovative ways and method to curb and mitigate the risks and possibility of an outbreak, while adhering to the measures put in place to ensure safety at the NYSC camps. The federal government had on Friday ruled out the possibility of another lockdown, given considerations to the brittle nature of the economy as the only reason. With the recent rise in COVID-19 cases posing a worrisome feat and equally posing a danger that bears more economic consequence, it is a case of keep the economy open and deal with the challenges that comes with it. Economy can be recovered regardless of the shape of the recovery (U, L, W or V).

The agency mobilised 297,293 corps members nationwide in 2017 and paid them N67,383,359,602 as allowances. The corps members were spread across two batches and two streams in 2017, with each stream having about 74,000 corps members. The issue of concessional posting is a challenge to the mobilisation process. The Presidential Task Force on Covid- 19 and Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) have said all National Youth Service Corp members will be subjected to a

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compulsory Covid- 19 on arrival at the orientation camps and only those who test negative to the virus will be permitted to participate in the scheme.

These are part of the guidelines agreed upon by the joint committee of NYSC, PTF Covid-19 and the NCDC to ensure that the 2020 NYSC orientation camp activities across the country does not throw the country into another outbreak and a strophic spread of the virus. Thus, curbing any possibility of a trojan like spread of the virus. The president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari has also directed the National Youth Service Corps to ensure that it oversees the enrolment of all corp members with the National Health Insurance Scheme. Testings to be conducted on prospective Corps members upon arrival at the camps will not come at any cost to the serving Corps members i.e., it would be free of charge. NCDC officials have already been deployed to several orientation camps around the country.

Other guidelines to ensure safe reopening of the orientation camps include:

1. Increase number of orientation camps across the country with the view of reducing the population of Corp member per Orientation camp and adhere to the social distancing pledge.
2. Fumigation of all orientation camps before they opened to the serving Corps members; this is meant to control the any spread.
3. Compulsory temperature screening at the entrance to the camp.
4. Mandatory use of face mask by all within the orientation camp community i.e., Corpers, camp officials, market operators and visitors.
5. 2 meters spacing between beds at the hostel.
6. All Corp members will be required to fill the COVID-19 testing self-reporting form before they would be given the all clear to download their call up letters.

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7. Reduction in the amount of people allowed to take part in each orientation exercise.
8. Hand hygiene stations will be strategically located at the camp;
9. Frequent sensitization on safety protocols and the need to adhere.¹⁴

Conclusion

Calls for scrapping of the program will continue to persist until those calls are honoured by any leadership who probably shares similar views. The leadership of the National Youth Service Corps must show unrivalled tact and put new technologies that show creativity and innovations. The issues around the scheme are not new, they have been the exact same issues in years. The leadership of the NYSC must set their hands on deck.

It is rather disheartening at times you see Corps members being rejected and having to roam aimlessly in a strange land, an unknown area whose language they do not understand, whose religion they possibly cannot relate with, whose demographics throws the corps members out of their elements in search of a place of primary assignment. In the service year, it is the task of the Government to act as parents of the corps members; the agency must be able to assure the parents of these youths that your wards are in good and safe hands.

If mobilization of these potential bread winners is the target, then considerations must be given to their safety, securing a place of primary assignment, safety from the pandemic, safety from religious bigots, safety from political thugs etc. Government must prove that Corps members are pawns that can be sacrificed to save the king or

¹⁴NYSC batch B 2020: Guidelines Prospective Corp members must do before dem enta camp," BBC News Pidgin, November 9, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-54874730>

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queen “NYSC”. Equity in posting free of preferences – the heightened level of insecurity in the country has done little to help dissuade the lobbying for choice areas. How can some of these challenges be overcome? In one word, TECHNOLOGY.

Although many of these challenges have been addressed through the application of the NYSC integrated platforms and ICT Solutions, the National Youth Service Corps has to wake up to the fourth industrial revolution. It is becoming pertinent now more than ever to be able to utilise and exploit new digital platforms. Blockchain is a system of recording information in a way that makes it difficult or impossible to change, hack, or cheat the system. A blockchain is essentially a digital ledger of transactions that is duplicated and distributed across the entire network of computer systems on the blockchain. Blockchain is a type of Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT) in which transactions are recorded with immutable cryptographic signature called a ‘hash’. If one block in one chain is altered, it would be immediately apparent it had been tampered with. If hackers wanted to corrupt blockchain, they would have to change every block in the chain, across all of the distributed versions of the chain.¹⁵

¹⁵“What is Blockchain” Euromoney Learning, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.euromoney.com/learning/blockchain-explained/what-is-blockchain>

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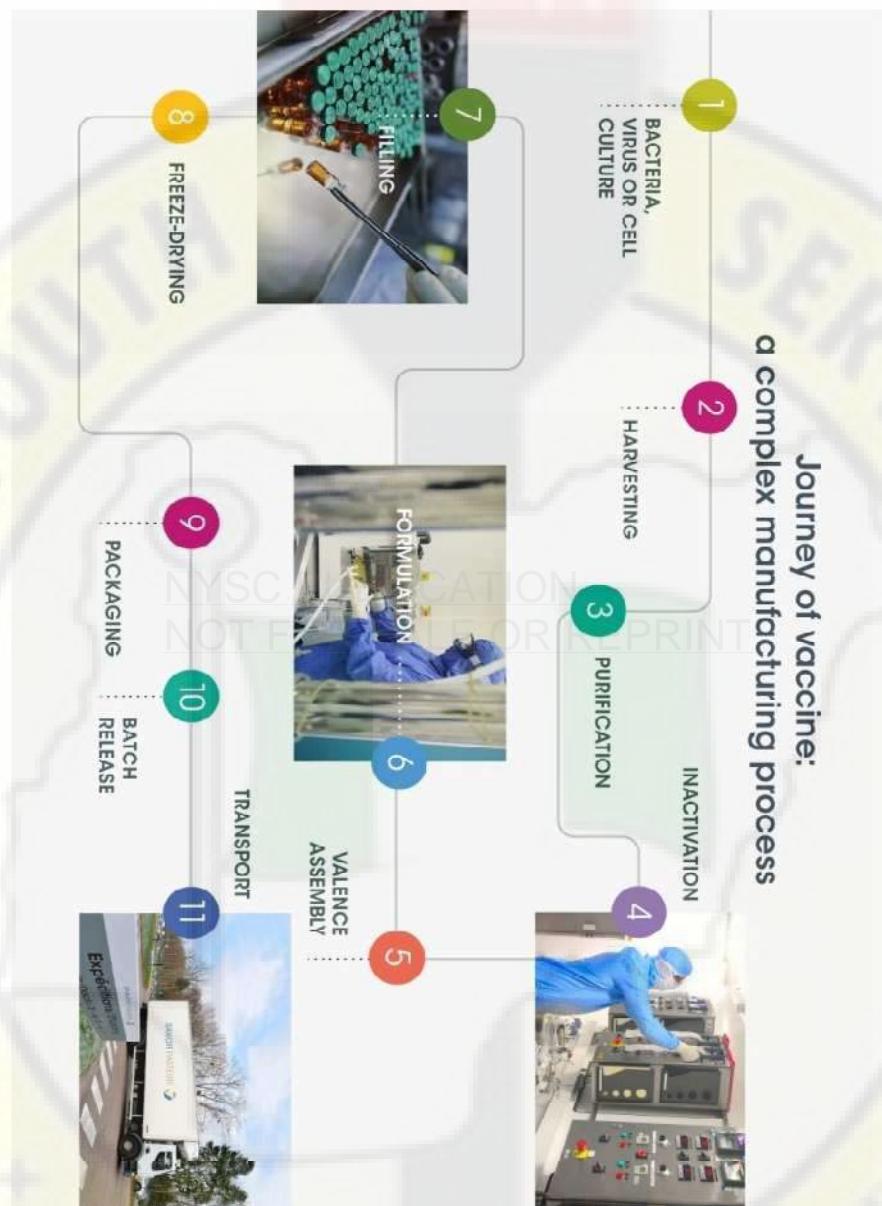
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Appendix 1: Vaccine Production Process



National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and Covid-19 Protocols:

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National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and COVID-19 Protocols: Case Study of Kaduna Orientation Camp

Olutayo Ajibade

Introduction

A World Health Organisation analysis on the global burden of disease estimates infectious disease related deaths to be about 12.3 million.¹ AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria, Lassa, Lower respiratory infections and Diarrheal diseases are the five major diseases that accounted for the 81 per cent of the total infections burdening the global population. But 97

¹“World Health Organization,” The Global Burden of Disease: 2004 Update. (2008), accessed 26, 2021,
https://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/2004_report_update/en

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per cent of these deaths from infectious diseases occur majorly in the developing countries.² Drawing from this, the recent Covid-19 outbreak has resulted in a global pandemic; which has crippled several aspects of human existence. The effect of the covid-19 which is a contagious disease has manifested in many countries of the world and it has been handled relatively as the case maybe. Although, the effect of the pandemic in many Sub-Saharan countries have not been as massive as predicted by the media or compared to other continents. As at February 2021, Africa is estimated to have about 3,754,326 cases of covid-19 compared to about 20,826,077 cases in Asia, 48,933,836 cases in America and so on.³ Despite being one of the continents with the least covid-19 cases, the effect of the pandemic has crippled her daily activities and consequently ruined her economy. In such precarious situation, several guidelines by different countries have been published to prevent the further spread of the infection. Hence, the body in charge of diseases prevention and control in Nigeria is the Nigeria Centre for disease Control (NCDC) and they have released several guidelines to curtail the spread of covid-19 within the 36 states and The Federal Capital Territory. These guidelines tagged the NCDC Covid-19 Protocol includes; measures to prevent, and control, the covid-19 infection within the Nigerian territory.

The Covid-19 infection was first discovered in Nigeria on 27 February, 2020, as an Italian citizen working in Nigeria displayed symptoms of the infection.⁴ This incidence and the continuous spread of the infection led to the shutting down of schools, business centers, Government

² "World Health Organization," TGBOD.

³ "European center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)," Covid-19 Situation Update Worldwide as of Week 6, Updated 18 February 2021, accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>.

⁴ "NCDC," First Case of Corona Virus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/227/first-case-of-corona-virus-disease-confirmed-in-nigeria>.

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Institutions and Parastatals etc. One of the government institutions affected was the National Youth service Corps (NYSC), a scheme established in 1973 and based on Decree no.24 to reconcile, reconstruct and re-build the country following the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970. The NYSC scheme involves certain exercises that promotes the ‘massive’ and ‘close’ interaction of several youths who have graduated from different universities within and outside the country in a confined space for a period of time. Sequentially, after a call-up letter is issued to prospective corps members, they are required to participate in an orientation (as earlier mentioned); for a period of three weeks in a military controlled camp situated in the 36 states plus the Federal capital territory of Nigeria. This orientation period involved the coming together or the mix of below or over 2000 corps members in a single camp in each state.⁵ The incidence of the covid-19 pandemic; therefore, made it mandatory for the suspension of the orientation camp to prevent the continued spread of the infection as the prospective corps members would be from different states of the federation, and the continuation of the orientation camp could consequently result to a breeding ground for the infection. Hence, orientation camp of NYSC scheme was suspended on March 12, 2020.⁶

As cases continued to rise, there was need for total and partial lockdown in several states like Lagos, Abuja and Kaduna, and several communication channels and information sharing channels were established and opened to the public to adequately sensitize Nigerians on prevention and disease control guidelines. This period was tagged the first wave of the covid-19 pandemic. As the Covid-19 pandemic cases dwindled down, several lockdown ‘easing’ protocols were

⁵ Oral Interview with Emilia Tanko, 35 years, NYSC Secretariat Chikun, 25/02/2021

⁶ Agency Report, “Covid-19: NYSC Prepares for Resumption of Orientation Camps,” *Premiuim times Nigeria*.November 5, 2020.

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/424808-covid-19-nysc-prepares-for-resumption-of-orientation-camps.html>

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published for schools, churches, businesses, government institutions etc. for effective disease prevention and control. A significant part of the NCDC covid-19 guidelines for resumption after the lockdown was the NYSC resumption covid-19 protocol, which detailed how to effectively control the spread of the disease in the camps. Therefore, it has become imperative to examine how covid-19 protocols were carried out in the first wave for a better handling of the second wave with reference to the NYSC orientation camp of 2020/2021.

Therefore, the Kaduna orientation camp as a case study is predicated on the commendation of NCDC on NYSC's adherence to covid-19 protocols, the stringent covid-19 protocol put in place by the state government and the state being the fourth state with the highest number of covid-19 cases (estimated to be at 8,448 as at 28thFebruary, 2021).⁷ The purpose of this study is to examine how the NCDC-NYSC covid-19 protocols were observed in Kaduna orientation camp using both primary and secondary sources of data. Therefore, the chapter is divided into five sections. The first section is the introduction, the second section is the clarification of concepts, the third section examines diseases transmission and the need for the covid-19 safety and security measure. Furthermore, the fourth section which is the major objective of this study examines how the NCDC covid-19 protocol was carried out at the Kaduna orientation Camp while the fifth section is the conclusion.

⁷ "Simona Varrella," Cumulative number of confirmed coronavirus cases (COVID-19) in Nigeria as of February 28, 2021, by state, accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1122620/coronavirus-cases-in-nigeria-by-state/>

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and Covid-19 Protocols:

Conceptual Clarification

NYSC: The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Nigeria was established in 1973. The Scheme was mainly targeted at enhancing the social cohesion within ethnic segregation and also bridging the gap of intricate development needs with the expertise of university graduates (Innovations in Civic Participation 2010d). However, currently one of its main aim is to “encourage youth to develop skills for self-employment”.⁸ F A Aremu⁹ opine that the initiative behind the NYSC was broad and timely in its days of establishment. Thus, in regards to its foundational decree the NYSC was targeted at reconciling, reconstructing and rebuilding the state after the civil war. Faced with the challenges of the post-civil war, the Government of General Yakubu Gowon established the scheme to advance unity among the divided ethnic groups within the country.¹⁰

The goals of the Scheme are evidently declared in Decree No. 51 of 16th June, 1993, which focused on instilling discipline in Nigerian youths by inculcating in them, a culture of industry at work, of loyal and patriotic service to Nigeria in whatever circumstance they find themselves.¹¹ The Scheme was thus a deliberate attempt at enhancing the moral standing of the Nigerian youths by establishing platforms for them to be educated about greater ideals of national success, cultural and social improvement through building in the Nigerian youths the behaviour of the mind, instilled through common experience and appropriate training.

⁸ “Innovations in Civic Participation,” Nigeria Country Profile, accessed February 24, 2021, <http://icicp.org/Nigeria>

⁹ Femi Aremu, “National Youth Service Corps Programme and the Quest for National Integration: Issues for Policy Consideration,” *Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, (2018): 5.

¹⁰ Aremu, “Policy Consideration,” 4.

¹¹ Aremu, “Policy Consideration,” 6.

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Therefore, NYSC scheme requires all Nigerian university graduates to serve for a period of a year in any areas within the country different from where they were brought up. After a quasi-military orientation camping session, Corps members are posted to their places of primary assignment where they are mandated to work for eleven months in a regular job, and also to introduce community development projects in the location of their primary assignment. Also, Corps members are allowed to serve in their professional areas. Furthermore, agricultural graduates provide expertise to farmers on crops and pesticides, while English graduates teach high school English. The government makes available stipends for corps members.

Nigerian National Youth Service component is divided into four components: orientation, primary assignment, community development and passing out ceremony. The scheme starts with a regimented three-week orientation camp in different states. Corps members are expected to wear uniforms throughout the camp without permission to leave the camp. Orientation exercises like physical training and sports competitions, drills, lectures on various social issues, social activities and language classes are programmed to inculcate the ideals of the programme, entrench comradery among Corps members and integrate them to the receiving state.

At the close of the orientation, Corps members collect their posting letters to “places of primary assignment” in any local government in the host state. They serve at this position till a complete service year, majorly as school teachers, staff in hospitals, government offices, private companies and non-profit organisations. Corps members normally collect a monthly stipend commensurate to the federal minimum wage (approximate to about 33.000 Naira as at 2021).¹²

¹² Oral interview with Oganija Mutiyat, 43years, NYSC Secretariat Kaduna,
24/02/2021

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and Covid-19 Protocols:

Orientation Camp: Orientation is the act or process of orienting.¹³ That is, an introduction, as to guide one in adjusting to new surroundings, employment, activity or the like while a camp is a secluded location with temporary accommodation of tents, huts or other structures typically for soldiers, refugees and travelling people.¹⁴Hence, orientation camp is an enlightenment training organised to enlighten a group of people in a secluded location different from their everyday life. In the orientation camps, necessary arrangements are made to receive the corps member. The orientation starts with registration of corps members at different designated registration points, a process in which the corps members have to cooperate with the NYSC officials for a successful registration. In this camp, everything needed are provided (Accommodation, clinic, mattresses/bed, water, food and kitting) and extra things needed can be purchased at a mini-market within the orientation camp. The system and operation are very coordinated with an Orientation Broadcasting Service (OBS) to promote quick flow information in the camp. There are also religious activities for the Christians and Muslims according to the guidelines provided by the NYSC. These three weeks orientation is filled with several programs including mandatory lectures to equip the corps members on the mission ahead of them. Hence, orientation activities include: Military Parade or Drill, Man O War, Social Activities, Endurance Trek and Lectures.¹⁵ It is worthy of note that these orientation camps are very secure as they are managed by the Nigerian Army. Corps members are entitled to transport allowance, local transport and the monthly allowance while in camp. Finally, one significant feature of the orientation camp is the level of discipline maintained.

¹³“Dictionary.com,” Orientation, accessed February 23, 2021,
<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/orientation>.

¹⁴ “Dictionary.com,” Orientation.

¹⁵ “NYSC-CDS,” All About NYSC Orientation Camp, accessed February 25, 2021,
<https://nysc-cds.com/all-about-nysc-orientation-camp>.

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COVID-19 Protocols: Covid-19 is a corona virus which is zoonotic, meaning it can be transmitted between animals and humans.¹⁶ This covid-19 virus is caused by a novel strain of the SARs-COV-2(i.e., Coronavirus) which have been discovered previously among humans.¹⁷ This novel strain of the coronavirus was first reported to WHO on 31st December, 2019 in Wuhan, China. This Virus is easily transmissible from person to person as it is airborne and more studies are being carried out to further understand this novel strain. But it is widely known that indoor locations with poor ventilation is a breeding space for the virus. Hence, adequate covid-19 safety and security measure which are referred to as the Covid-19 protocols have been put in place to control and prevent the spread of the virus. These measures include; social distancing, isolation, protective equipment and quarantine¹⁸, which will be discussed later in the body of the work.

Understanding Diseases Transmission and the Need for NCDC COVID-19 Protocol

The transmission of diseases is an important aspect in the study of infections. Hence, disease transmission is divided into two, namely: the direct and indirect means of transmission.

1. Direct Transmission: this refers to the immediate transfer of infectious agents to a receptive portal of entry through which human or animal infection could take place. It can be through direct contact such as: biting, touching, kissing or through direct projection of droplets into the conjunctiva or mucous

¹⁶ "NCDC," Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), accessed February 25, 2021, <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/faq/>

¹⁷ "NCDC," FAQs.

¹⁸ "Narayana Health Care," Covid-19 Protocol: What is Isolation, Quarantine and Social Distancing? Accessed February 26, 2021, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.narayanahealth.org/blog/covid-19-protocol-isolation-quarantine-social-distancing/>

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and Covid-19 Protocols:

membranes of the nose, eye or mouth during spitting, coughing, sneezing, talking, singing etc.¹⁹

2. Indirect Transmission: under the indirect form of disease transmission, we have the vehicle borne transmission through inanimate objects and material, for example: handkerchiefs, bedding, cooking or eating utensils, toys, soil clothes, serum, blood etc.²⁰ likewise, we have the vector borne transmission which is the transmission of disease through crawling or flying insects or by more biologically advanced method called propagation, cycle development etc.²¹ lastly, under indirect transmission, we have the airborne transmission, which is “the dissemination of microbial aerosol to a suitable portal of entry usually the respiratory tract”.²² This form of transmission entails suspension of micro-organism infested particles in the air. Hence, the alveoli of the lungs can easily draw particle in the range of 1-5 micrometer leading to infestation of the prospective host.²³

In the chain of infection, humans are the final link and they are often infested through the following portals; respiratory tracks, intact skin, mucous membranes, genitourinary system, placenta etc. depending on the disease transmission method of the infectious diseases.²⁴

COVID-19 is an airborne disease, easily transmitted through both direct and indirect transmissions. Humans contract this virus through droplets from coughing, sneezing, through fomite, in the present

¹⁹ Daniel L. Heyman, (ed.) *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, Washington DC: American Public Health Association, 19 (2008).

²⁰ Heymann, D. L., *Manual*.

²¹ Robert J. Kim-farley, “Principles of infectious Disease Control” in *Oxford Textbook of Global Public Health* (6. ed.), ed. Detel, R, et al. (oxford University Press), 5 (2015): 8.

²² Kim-farley, “Principles of infectious,” 9.

²³ Kim-farley, “Principles of infectious,” 9.

²⁴ Heyman, D.L. (2008). *Control of Communicable Disease ...*

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environment of an infected person. Therefore, COVID-19 virus is transmitted through direct contact with an infected person or indirectly through contact with surfaces or objects in the immediate environment of an infected person. Another, important means of covid-19 transmission is the transmission through droplets in form of particles in the air.²⁵

Therefore, there is need for control measures, which have been tagged covid-19 protocols to control the spread of this novel virus. The control of infectious diseases means actions and programs carried out with the aim of reducing disease incidence (i.e., infections), reducing diseases prevalence or total eradication of the disease.²⁶ Hence, there are primary and secondary preventive methods but the primary preventive method will be focused on because it entails preventing the spread of disease or their risk factors; through community wide and individual measure to contain the spread of the virus. As mentioned earlier, covid-19 can be transmitted to direct and indirect medium, therefore some standard precaution are to be upheld as universal protocol designed to control the risk of transmission and they include, hand washing, use of personal protective equipment (face shield, appropriate application of mask and eye protection, use of gloves), adequate environment control measures for routine care, cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces, appropriate handling, transporting, good respiratory hygiene etc. covid-19 as an airborne disease requires the use of mask to prevent droplets from infected person to non-infected person, use of chemicals and cleaning agents for protection of surfaces and objects, absolute or modified quarantine for exposed person or those who have the high risk of exposure etc.

²⁵ "WHO," Modes of Transmission of coiv-19: Implication for IPC Precaution Recommendation: Scientific Brief, accessed February 24, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/details/modes-of-transmission-of-virus-causing-covid-19-implications-for-ipc-precaution-recommendations>

²⁶ Kim-farley, "Principles of infectious ...

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For this reason, NCDC as the body in control of Diseases in Nigeria had to develop safety and security measures to prevent the spread of the novel COVID-19. Hence, they released a set of guidelines for the commencement of the NYSC orientation camp. The following are the general measures in place. The NYSC in consultation with the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (PTF-COVID-19) and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) have developed these guidelines to facilitate the safe conduct of the 2020 NYSC orientation camp activities in all NYSC camps across the country.²⁷

- i. All Corps members will be tested for COVID-19 on arrival. Only those whose test results are negative will proceed to register in the camp. It is essential to conduct covid-19 test and anyone with symptoms should take a test, or those who are close to people who have the virus etc. everyone needs to be tested.²⁸
- ii. Additional orientation camps will be provided in each State/FCT to reduce the number of participants in each camp. This is to ensure the observance of physical distancing. Covid-19 virus is said to be more potent in places or locations with many people, thereby reducing the ventilation in the particular location, making it easier for the transmission of the disease.
- iii. As part of usual practice, all orientation camps will be fumigated/decontaminated before the commencement of the orientation exercise. The life expectancy of the covid-19 virus is estimated at to be within hours to days. This is also dependent on the type of surface and other factors including humidity and temperature. It is estimated that on

²⁷ “NCDC,” Guidelines on 2020 National Youth service corps (NYSC) Orientation Camp Activities, accessed February 25, 2021, www.covid19.ncdc.gov.ng

²⁸ “Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,” Testing for Covid-19, Accessed February 23, 2021, www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html.

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non-porous surfaces (glass, stainless steel and plastics), the virus last for three to seven days while it lasts for hours or few days on paper and cardboards.²⁹³⁰ Hence, surface have to be decontaminated with a number of solutions. Fumigation of surfaces is key to control the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 (corona virus).³¹

- iv. In addition to the fumigation/decontamination of the camps, there will be enforcement of physical distancing, regular hand washing, use of face coverings and proper hygiene in all camps. The essence of physical distancing is to reduce the spread of the virus by asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals. Since some infested persons cannot easily be identified. Face covering or face mask is essential to reduce the volume and the travel distance of expiratory droplets that escapes during coughing, talking etc. Hence, a face mask without a holes or vents are effective in filtering out particles that might have been contaminated by the virus from exhaled and inhaled air, thereby reducing the chances of infection. Hand washing is important after coughing or sneezing. Hence, WHO recommends that individuals wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.³²Also, to maintain

²⁹ Chin, Alex W H et al, "Stability of SARS-CoV-2 in Different Environment Conditions," *Lancet Microbe*, 1(1) 2020, doi:10.1016/S2666-5247(20)30003-3.

³⁰ Hamada A. Aboubakrl, et al, "Stability of SARS-CoV-2 and Other Coronaviruses in the Environment and On Common Touch Surfaces and The Influence of Climatic Conditions: A Review". *Transboundary and Emerging Diseases*. (2020). doi:10.1111/tbed.13707.

³¹ Goldman, Emanuel "Exaggerated Risk of Transmission of COVID-19 by Fomites". *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*. 20 (8) (2020): 892–893. doi:10.1016/S1473-3099(20)30561-2.

³² "World Health Organisation," Advice for the Public on Covid-19-World Health Organisation". World Health Organisation, accessed February 26, 2021,

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- hygienic hands by using alcohol-based hand sanitizer of about 60 per cent when soap and water is not available.³³
- v. There will be compulsory temperature screening at every camp entrance. The essence of the screening is to identify people with increased or high temperature which is one of the symptoms of the covid-19 virus. But this should be used in place of their effective control measures.³⁴
 - vi. The use of face masks is compulsory for every Corps member, camp officials and visitors.
 - vii. Beds in hostels will be re-arranged to allow for two-metres spacing, which will ensure physical distancing as provided for in the COVID-19 safety protocol.
 - viii. Lectures will be conducted observing physical distancing and will be complemented via e-learning tools.
 - ix. COVID-19 safety measures will be part of the content of the call-up letters for prospective Corps members. All Corps members are required to fill the COVID-19 testing self-reporting form before they can download their call up letters.
 - x. There will be deliberate reduction in the number of participants during each orientation exercise in order to free up spaces in the hostels and make for proper physical distancing and better ventilation.

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

³³ “National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD),” COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings, accessed February 25, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html>

³⁴ “Work Safe Victoria,” Managing Coronavirus (covid-19) Risks: Temperature Screening, accessed February 26, 2021, www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/managing-coronavirus-covid19-risks-temperature-screening

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- xi. Camp officials, in addition to the corps members, shall be sensitised fully on the required measures. At initial outbreak of the covid-19 virus, many misinformation and disinformation were widely spread in even though their organ were not known.³⁵This reality has made the need to share accurate and adequate information very important.
- xii. There will be Infection Prevention Control reminders and communication materials prominently displayed in every part of the camp.
- xiii. Hand hygiene stations will be set up across strategic locations in the camp.

Kaduna State NYSC Orientation Camp and COVID-19 Protocols

The covid-19 global pandemic has made the need for the implementation of certain drastic measures important; to curb the spread of the virus. Many countries in the world have instituted several safety and security measures (most importantly partial or total lockdown) to control the spread. Nigeria as a country is not left out in the global effort to curb the spread of the virus, although different states within the country have put in place different measures to protect its citizens. Kaduna state was perceived as one of the states with stringent covid-19 protocol with the total lock down of schools, worship centers, business centers, etc. According to the Deputy Governor of the state:

The fragility of the social fabric in a developing country like Nigeria limits the utility of lockdowns as a containment strategy. We imposed quarantine orders to slow the spread of the infection and set mobile courts to enforce the regulations. We have noticed gaps

³⁵ "Josh Taylor," Bat Soup, Dodgy Cures and 'Diseasology': The Spread of Coronavirus Misinformation, *The Guardian*. January 31, 2020.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/31/bat-soup-dodgy-cures-and-diseasology-the-spread-of-coronavirus-bunkum>

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in enforcement capacity and are engaging with the institutions that can remedy this.³⁶

This statement reinforces the commitment of the Kaduna state Governor to the covid-19 protocols. The focus of this paper is to examine how Kaduna state commitment to covid19 protocol reflected in her adherence to the NCDC Covid-19 protocol in the NYSC orientation camp. NYSC after consultation with the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (PTF-COVID-19) and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) was allowed to commence the 2020 NYSC orientation camp activities across the country. Specifically, the Kaduna Rapid Response Team (RRT)was given the responsibility of assessing the readiness of the State NYSC Orientation camp and training of some of the staff of NYSC and corps members to ensure that all measures put in place are adhered to.³⁷ All corps members were to be tested for COVID-19 on arrival. Only those whose test results are negative will proceed to register in the camp.³⁸The NYSC orientation camp was officially reopened on January 19th, 2021 Nationwide. However, a member of the Infection Prevention and Control team and surveillance pillar of the State RRT has been in the camp testing all camp officials and other collaborating agencies, making sure that the IPC protocols are being observed. The two focal persons sent to the camp are: Zakka Emmanuel Jonathan and Hamisu Kabiru.³⁹

The Kaduna state NYSC orientation camp is located at the Kaduna-Abuja road and corps member posted to the state are expected to

³⁶ "Hadiza Balarabe," On Combatting Covid-19 and Strengthening the Health Care System, accessed February 27, 2021, Oxford business group.com/views/dr-hadiza-balarabe-deputy-governor-kaduna-state.

³⁷ IPC Team, *IPC Report on the Activities in the NYSC Orientation Camp, Kaduna, Batch B-Stream II. (19t Jan – 8th Feb. 2021)*

³⁸ "NCDC," Guidelines on 2020 National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Orientation Camp activities, accessed February 23, 2021,
<https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/guideline/>

³⁹ IPC Team, *IPC Report,*

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spend 21 days in the camp. The orientation camp provides them with accommodation in the hostels as they are mandated in the 21 days period to participate in military parades, lectures, physical exercises and so on. This period involves a huge number of corps members in a confined space that give room for close interaction, thereby predisposing both the NYSC official and corps members to the covid-19 virus. Furthermore, military drills and Man O'war activities involve the use of apparatus that can harbour this coronavirus; hence the need to adhere strictly to the NCDC guidelines to control the spread of the virus to the orientation camp. Each covid-19 protocol will be examined in respect to its execution in the Kaduna orientation camp.

1. Reduction in the Number of Participants in each Camp: The essence of reducing the number of corps members in the orientation camp at a particular time is to ensure that the social distancing protocol was observed. The Kaduna Orientation camp can accommodate or usually accommodate about 1800 to 2200⁴⁰ corps member at a time but in adherence to the NCDC covid-19 protocol, the number of corps members were reduced to about 739 participants at a time.⁴¹ The reduction in number allowed for easy implementation of the social distancing protocol in the places of worship, lecture halls, kitchen etc.⁴² According to Chukwumara Bibian, a Corp member, "the number was reduced by over half to ensure social distancing".⁴³ To further adhere to the social distancing rule, the camp made use of electronic media with frequent broadcast of NYSC covid-19 protocols and online covid-19 'questionnaires were provided'.⁴⁴ it is worthy of note that in order to accommodate all the corps members posted to Kaduna state, the

⁴⁰ Oral Interview with Emilia Tanko, 35years. Nysc Secretariat Chikun, 20/02/2021.

⁴¹ IPC Team, *IPC Report*,

⁴² IPC Team, *IPC Report*.

⁴³ Oral interview with Chukwumara Bibian, 26 years. NYSC Kaduna. 20/02/2021

⁴⁴ Oral Interview with Dr John, 31years, Federal Cooperative College Kaduna, 21/02/2021.

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orientation Camp was split into two groups (stream 1A and stream 1B).⁴⁵

2. Fumigation or Decontamination of the Camp: the NCDC mandates that before the commencement of the orientation exercise that the camps are to be fumigated because of the airborne nature of the covid-19 virus and to prevent the indirect transmission of the virus as several objects and surfaces will be handled by many participants within the period of time. 60 per cent of the interviewed participants at the Kaduna orientation camp testified to the fumigation of the camp while 40 per cent are not aware whether it was done or not. Fumigation was “part of the steps taken before every orientation camp begins. During this covid-19 era; every individual’s bag is first decontaminated before been allowed into the camp.⁴⁶

3. Temperature Screening at Camp Entrance: the NCDC mandated temperature screening at every camp entrance. One of the generally known symptom of the covid-19 virus is increase in temperature. Such temperature screening assist to enable the identification of a possible carrier of the virus. In Kaduna orientation camp, the health personnel were in charge of the screening⁴⁷while some other participants were of the opinion that the screening was made easy by the security officials⁴⁸ who have been trained before the commencement of the camp.⁴⁹ Finally, according to the IPC report on the activities in the orientation Camp: “everyone entering the camp including camp officials, corps members and visitors coming into the camp were screened for temperature at the gate using an infrared

⁴⁵ Oral Interview with Emilia Tanko.

⁴⁶ Oral Interview with Emilia Tanko.

⁴⁷ Oral interview with Gambo patience, 28years, Corp member: Romi Kaduna 20/02/2021.

⁴⁸ Oral interview with Mary Usman, Adult, Nysc Staff:Kaduna, 20/02/2021.

⁴⁹ Oral Interview with Emilia Tanko ...

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thermometer and asked to perform hand hygiene while their luggage is decontaminated".⁵⁰

4. Compulsory Use of Protective Covering and Social Distancing: the NYSC covid-19 protocol made the use of protective covering (face mask) compulsory for NYSC officials, Corps members and visitors. According to the IPC Report: "throughout the duration of the three weeks in camp, there was a total compliance of the use of face mask by both corps members and camp officials in the lecture halls, kitchen, places of worship were marked to signified physical distancing". In adherence to the social distancing rule, the beds in the hostels were adequately spaced with about 2 meters spacing between each bed. According to Bosede Oyetuji, there were two beds interval in the hostel⁵¹ while Catherine Philemon believes this was possible as a result of the few number of corps members in the hostel.⁵²

5. Proper Hygiene: According to the NCDC guideline, Hand hygiene stations should be set up across all strategic locations. "There were 22 hand hygiene taps at the entrance of the camp where people coming into the camp are asked to perform hand hygiene before proceeding into the camp".⁵³In addition to the station at the entrance of the camp, there are other hand hygiene stations located at several strategic points in the camp for corps members and other people in the camp community to use frequently. Also, all the stores within the camp area had Hand Hygiene equipment at the entrance to their stores for customers to make use of.⁵⁴ Furthermore, hand washing basins were

⁵⁰ IPC Team, *IPC Report*,

⁵¹ Oral Interview with Bosede Oyetuji, 48 years, NYSC secretariat Chikun.
20/02/2021.

⁵² Oral Interview with Catherine Philemon, 56years, Nysc Office:Kaduna,
20/02/2021.

⁵³ IPC Team, *IPC Report*,

⁵⁴ IPC Team, *IPC Report*,

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placed at the entrance of each hostel.⁵⁵ In the area of waste management, all waste products generated from the Kaduna orientation camp were burnt every day, likewise to waste products generated from the Health care center, these wastes were divided into different waste bags according to the nature of the waste product generated before burning them.⁵⁶

6. Sensitisation: Camp officials and the corps members should be sensitised fully on the required methods through reminders and communication materials. All of the interviewed participants agreed they were adequately sensitised on covid-19 measure. According to the IPC Team:

Prior to the commencement of the orientation camp, some members of staff were trained and an IPC committee was constituted amongst the staff members. During the orientation course, The IPC focal person on camp delivered two different lectures to the corp members. Again, A Covid-19 Vanguard was constituted in camp to serve as ambassadors within the camp community and they were trained and mandated to replicate same to their peers in the hostels and within the camp. Jingles and Talk shows on Covid-19 were also anchored by the OBS at intervals to enlighten the camp community at leisure times. The Covid-19 vanguard also held sensitization awareness within the camp community and also staged drama performance during the social activities in the camp to create more awareness to other members present.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Oral Interview with Emilia Tanko.

⁵⁶IPC Team, *IPC Report*,

⁵⁷IPC Team, *IPC Report*,

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In the word of one of the interviewed participants “yes, I learnt proper way to sanitize my hand and use nose mask; proper use of personal protective equipment and how to protect myself and others from covid-19”.⁵⁸

7. COVID-19 Test: The Kaduna Orientation camp mandated the testing of all corps members on arrival and allowed those with negative results to proceed. The total number of people tested were 1,076. While 739 of them were corps members and 337 were camp officials. “Out of the 739 Corp members, 15 tested positive while 724 tested Negative. 3 people out of the 337 camp officials tested positive while 334 tested negative”.⁵⁹ The table below gives a summary of the test conducted.

Number of tests	Total Test	Negative	Positive
Corp Members	739	724	15
Staff	144	142	2
Collaborating Agencies	193	192	1

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There were holding rooms or area for those with positive covid-19 test. According to the IPC team’s report about three rooms were provided for holding positive Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT) results candidates.⁶⁰ One of the rooms had a total bed capacity of eight beds for male patient, while the other two rooms had a seven-bed holding capacity for the female patients who tested positive before validating

⁵⁸ Oral Interview with Emilia Tanko.

⁵⁹ IPC Team, *IPC Report*,

⁶⁰ IPC Team, *IPC Report*.

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their result using Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR).⁶¹ There was an isolation center where the 18 positive cases were kept. Out of the 18 positive cases, 14 were prospective corps members, one collaborating agent, one corps member and two camp officials.⁶² All of them were isolated in the state isolation centers located within the town. "All of the positive cases were confirmed negative and were discharged after their stay at the isolation center".⁶³

The COVID-19 test did not look harmful the way I thought it will be, it was fast and accurate"⁶⁴. "an object like a litmus paper was inserted in my nose and the result was detected negative"⁶⁵, Emilia Tanko described her experience as "highly uncomfotting and nerve recking",⁶⁶ Mary Usman said it was "painful", according to Ruth Ibrahim said the test affected her right eye.⁶⁷ Ruki Magit described his experience: "I was irritated when the swap stick was pushed inside my nose."⁶⁸ All these evidences allude to the compliance of Kaduna Orientation Camp to Covid-19 protocols.

Conclusion

The challenges experienced during the Kaduna orientation camp exercise was inadequate ambulance services for the transport of sample tests and covid-19 confirmed case patients to the isolation center. However, majority of the participants during the research considered the conduct of the orientation camp according to the NCDC covid-19 protocol as 'adequate'; as they were impressed with the hygienic standards upheld in the camp. The Infection Prevention and

⁶¹ IPC Team, *IPC Report*.

⁶² IPC Team, *IPC Report*.

⁶³ IPC Team, *IPC Report*.

⁶⁴ Oral Interview with Nwokora Ada, 29 years, NYSC Chikun, corps member.

⁶⁵ Oral Interview with Nwokora Ada.

⁶⁶ Oral Interview with Emilia Tanko.

⁶⁷ Oral Interview with Ruth Ibrahim, Nysc Staff:Kaduna, 24/02/2021

⁶⁸ Oral Interview with Ruki Magit, 39 years, NYSC office:Kaduna, 24/02/2021.

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Control team members worked in collaboration with the surveillance team members to enforce total compliance with the NCDC guidelines. The IPC members implemented daily checks in the camp to enforce full compliance with the IPC guidelines derived from the NCDC protocol, have physical and Virtual meetings with the IPC task force in camp to address issues of concern to them.⁶⁹ There was full compliance with the NCDC guidelines throughout the 3 weeks' orientation exercise. All positive cases were later confirmed negative and discharged from the holding bay where they were isolated.

⁶⁹ IPC Team, *IPC Report*.

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**The Contribution of the National Youth Service Corps
(NYSC) in the Management of COVID-19 Pandemic:
The Role of Corps Medical Personnel**

Eduvvie Nyerohwo Avi

Introduction

The establishment of the National Youth Service Corps under Decree No. 24 of May 22 1973 provided the need for nation building and development, in which the experience of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-70, created disaffections within the country. The Scheme was conceived after the War as a means to concretize the Federal Government's agenda of the post war effort of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction (3Rs) for national integration. The NYSC has been seen

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over the years as one of the most successful programme that the Federal Government set up for the purpose of the 3Rs and it is still effective up to this moment. However, to place this discussion of the contribution of the NYSC with the impact of Covid-19 on the scheme and the roles played by Corps members especially Corps medical personnel in ameliorating the impact of the pandemic in Nigeria into proper perspective, it is pertinent to look briefly into the antecedents which led to these critical interventions and their far-reaching impact.

The Contribution of NYSC on the Eve of COVID-19

The National Youth Service Corps scheme is a graduate programme meant specifically for graduates of tertiary institutions to give an active or compulsory service to the nation for one year as a way of integrating them into geographical regions other than their own. The primary purpose of the scheme is to instil in them the spirit of national service or selfless service to the community, and stress the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians irrespective of culture or social background¹. The history of the nation since independence points to the need for unity among the people and the future professionals were at the centre point of this initiative of national integration. This category of young professionals from different academic fields who were called upon to serve the nation after graduating from higher institutions of learning are referred to as corps members.

Situating the foregoing within the Nigerian youth development perspectives, it is widely recognised that Nigerian youth capabilities are limited by lack of economic opportunities, unemployment, an inept educational system and a lack of institutional capacity to sustain human development interventions². However, the resonating reality of harnessing the existing youth potentials in the national development of

¹NYSC, *NYSC Handbook*, Abuja National Youth Service, 1992, p. 1.

²E.E Okafor, "Youth Unemployment and Implications for Stability of Democracy in Nigeria", *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 2011, vol. 13(1), p.358-373.

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Nigeria has proved uniquely daunting, as youth voices are often not considered in the design of national development policies. In this light, the Nigeria Youth Service Corps (NYSC) – a product of federal military government of the Gowon's Regime, which was established as a post-civil war intervention in 1973 became institutionalized under decree No.24, with the purpose of promoting national unity and foster common socio-cultural ties among the youths in Nigeria³. Indeed, four decades after its establishment, the NYSC has snowballed into an operational vehicle for harnessing the collective capabilities of Nigerian youths for Nigeria's national development drive through its youth deployment strategy into key sectors of the economy.

However, one of the core objectives contained in the NYSC Act⁴ states that the scheme is meant to develop a sense of corporate and common destiny of the Nigerian people. It is also mandated to ensure a dynamic economy through promoting self-reliance by effective utilization of skills of our youth⁵. Thus, this provision in a way revolutionised the direction of the NYSC scheme from a mere fulfilling or sustaining the nation's unity but became a skill acquiring and investment agency, which in itself is now contributing to the national treasury. The review of orientation course activities, especially one that incorporated the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme officially commenced in 2012⁶ and faced tremendous development over the years. The introduction of in-camp and post-camp SAED training was a transformation of the scheme, especially with the intention of making our youth self-reliant and employers of labour instead of leaving service to become job-seekers/hunters.

³NYSC, *National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Handbook*, (Abuja: NYSC, 1999).

⁴NYSC Act, Cap N. 84, Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004.

⁵Ayem Kayode Amos, "NYSC Continuity and Progress Amidst a Pandemic"

⁶Meakpakhe Anawekhai, "Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme", *Global Innovation Exchange*, March 12, 2020.

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Another cardinal point of the NYSC which utilizes the potentials of youth is community development service. In commendation of this development, O.A Ayobami⁷ notes that the Scheme actively engaged the Youths across the 774 Local Government Areas through community development programmes within the period of 12 months mandatory national service⁸.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The corona virus epidemic is an infectious disease caused by a severe acute respiratory syndrome called corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)⁹. The disease was first discovered in December 2019 in Chinese Wuhan and Hubei Provinces of China and has been termed a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in January 2020¹⁰. Nigeria recorded its first confirmed case on 27 of February 2020, following an Italian national who tested positive to the virus¹¹. Although, Nigerian recorded a second case on 9th March 2020, the people felt the non-existence of this virus in Nigeria".¹²

With spike in the Covid19 cases in Nigeria, the Nigerian Federal Government announced a 14 days lockdown on the 30th of March 2020, in its target to major states (Lagos and Ogun) of the federation and

⁷Oludiran A.A, "Towards National Development in Post-Covid-19 Era, *Osun Kopa*", Batch 'C' , 2019.

⁸Oludiran A.A, "Towards National Development in Post-Covid-19 Era... 2019.

⁹African Union, "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)", www.africacdc.org, retrieved 2021.

¹⁰World Health Organisation, "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19", www.who.int, 11 March 2019.

¹¹J. Amzat, K. Aminu and M. Danjibo, "Coronavirus Outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and Socio-Medical Response during the First 100 Days", *International Journals of Infectious Diseases*, 2020, p. 98.

¹²Poynter, Viral Photo in Niger Suggests Former President Obasanjo Said there is no Corononavirus in Nigeria and that the Minister of Health Lied, www.poynter.org, March 2, 2020.

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Federal Capital Territory, Abuja¹³. While other states, also responded to the covid19 hikes were shut down by their respective State Governors. Most of these reported cases, most notable Nigerians, mostly political elites such as the Son of the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, Mohammed Abubakar, Abba Kyari, Bauchi's Governor Bala Mohammed, Nasir El-Rufa'i among others tested positive to the novel virus. Although the restriction was lifted, more cases of the corona virus continue to emerge.

In now what is referred to as a recent surge of the Covid19 in most of the states of the Federation, state governors, senators, traditional rulers and their appointees became vulnerable to the virus. For instance, a week after the Delta State Secretary to the Government and the Commissioner of Information tested positive, the daughter of the Delta State Governor was reported to have the pandemic, within the same week the State Governor and his wife became infected of the virus. Akeredolu-Ale, the Governor of Ondo State, the Deputy Governor of Bauchi State, Baba Teba, and among others, and with the cases rising to over 28,167 as at 05/07/2020, there were complaint of denials by people from the political elites.

For instance, the chairman of the Presidential Task Force, Boss Mustapha, expressed the attitude of the people towards the Pandemic, especially failing to observe the guidelines put together by the Nigerian Center For Disease Control (NCDC). He has urged Nigerians on June 25 "I am appealing to Nigeria, let's take this thing seriously"¹⁴. Following the surge of positive cases among Governor Ortom's political appointees coupled with his wife and son, the Benue's Governor had appealed to his people "Covid19 is real and I enjoin my people to take it

¹³O. Kola, "COVID-19: Nigeria Announces Lockdown of Major Cities", www.aa.com.tr, March 29, 2020.

¹⁴A. R. A. Shabah, "Nigeria Coronavirus: Cases Hit 10,162", www.africanews.com, July 1, 2020.

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seriously”¹⁵. This message continue to be a rallying call for the Nigerian people who are living in self-denial of a virus that has infected over 11 million people around the globe and killed over five hundred thousand persons between December 2019 to July 2020.

The Impact of COVID-19 on the NYSC Scheme

The COVID-19 Pandemic in no doubt affected the activities of the scheme, as well as threatening to put the NYSC Programme in limbo. This became evident in the suspension of 2020 Batch ‘A’ Stream ‘One’ Orientation Course after a week of resumption¹⁶. This announcement did not augur well with the Corps members, such that some of them argued that since they were already in camp, they were in a safe and isolated environment, allowing them to leave would make them to be expose to the virus¹⁷. The corps members were prepared to remain in the camp rather than leaving and this cry was nationwide.

The NYSC DG conveyed the suspension of the orientation course to the various State Coordinators, which was later dispatched through the information portal of the scheme explaining the purpose of the closure of the camp to Corps members, that it was driven by the high premium placed on the lives and safety of Corps members and staff. The proactive step taken by the Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19, and with the endorsement of Director General to suspend camp activities was meant to avert the spread of COVID-19 in the various orientation camps¹⁸. With this development, several orientation camps were also prepared for use as isolation centers to further increase the

¹⁵ BBC News, “COVID-19: Governor Ortom Wife, Eunice, Son and Staff of Benue State First Lady Test Positive for Coronavirus”, www.bbc.com/pidgin, 4 July 2020.

¹⁶ Ruth Okwumbu, “NYSC’s Orientation suspension only a precautionary measure – DG, NYSC”, *Nairametrics*, March 18, 2020.

¹⁷ Interviews with Chioma Nwabuokei, Ex-Corps Member Batch C Stream one, Asaba, 24, 18-02-2021.

¹⁸ Ruth Okwumbu, “NYSC’s Orientation suspension only a precautionary measure – DG, NYSC”, *Nairametrics*, March 18, 2020.

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contribution of the scheme to the overall effort to control the spread of the pandemic. Hence, the justification of the closure became sacrosanct for the survival of the scheme and, also as a preventive measure taken by the NYSC to save lives of Corps members and Staff.

With the closure of the camp and NYSC activities, the need to assert the relevance of the Scheme became imminent. This was when Brig. Gen. Ibrahim's leadership quality became most needed in the NYSC. At this time, the Brigadier rose to the occasion and directed the various State coordinators, with strict supervision, to ensure that corps members aid the Federal and State governments in the fight against the Pandemic. In this light, the Osun State NYSC Coordinator, Mr. Adegoke, during the occasion of donating protective equipment such as face masks, hand sanitisers, antiseptic soaps produced by members of the Scheme to the Osun State Government, disclosed thus: "the production of the support materials... was the initiative of the NYSC Director General...."¹⁹In Kaduna State, the NYSC became the first Government organization to evolve production of COVID-19 preventive equipment, especially in the manufacturing of Sanitizers, facemasks, face shields, automated hand washing machine etc²⁰.

These initiatives of the scheme as prudently pursued by the Director General remains a major reason the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 considered and approved the re-opening of the NYSC Orientation Camps. The Director-General with his leadership acumen implored the Corps members to make gooduse of the opportunity of the Pandemic by involving themselves in the production of protective equipment against the novel virus²¹, while they in turn make some gains/profits. After obeying the clarion call from the management to serve their

¹⁹Osun Kopa, "COVID-19: NYSC Donates Sanitisers, Facemask"

²⁰Interviews with NYSC Coordinator, Kaduna State Secretariat, 18/02/2020

²¹Media Assessment, "How we are Rebranding NYSC for Youth Empowerment, Revenue Generation", Exclusive interview of Brig. Shuaibu Ibrahim, D.G, NYSC by Economic Confidential, May 17, 2020, *Leadwatch Publication Ltd.*, 2020, p. 81.

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immediate environment and the larger society, the Corps members hit the ground running. According to the DG, “there is also a medical doctor who is involved in the production of facemasks”²². Of course, this could only be achieved through the rebranding of the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) by the current DG, who revolutionized the SAED programme.

Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers (HIRD)

The NYSC Health Sector whose job was mainly to provide medical assistance to Corps members and staff in camp and also rendered services to the general public, especially in their places of primary assignment. The Health Sector, which is made of Medical Doctors, Pharmacists, Lab Scientists, Nurses and other paramedics operate a programme called “Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers”(HIRD)²³, an initiative launched in Kwara in 2014 and became fully operational in all states in 2015.²⁴

Under the leadership of the then Director General, Brig. General JB Olawumi²⁵, the initiative has the core mandate of providing timely health interventions to the rural population in Nigeria. Currently, this programme has been effective in reaching out to core rural areas to enhance the accessibility of health care services by rural dwellers. The intervention engages corps medical personnel in sensitizing mostly vulnerable rural dwellers on disease prevention, providing first aid, monitoring of cases and providing appropriate referral when necessary.

²² Media Assessment, “How we are Rebranding NYSC for Youth Empowerment, Revenue Generation”... 2020, p. 81.

²³ NYSC, “National Youth Service Corps Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers - Profile”, www.nysc.gov.ng, Retrieved February 23/02/2021.

²⁴ The Nation, “NYSC begins Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers in Ogun”, www.thenationonlineng.net, October 12, 2017.

²⁵ NYSC, “National Youth Service Corps Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers - Profile”... 2021, p. 6.

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Table 13.1: NYSC HIRD Activities before the outbreak of COVID-19

S/N	States	Activities	Remarks
1.	Kwara	The NYSC D.G Brig. Gen. J. Olawumi launched the HIRD, by soliciting support from Kwara State Government and other State Govts over this initiative. ²⁶	In Nov. 14, 2014 the Scheme launched the initiative at Igbo Owu, Kwara State.
2.	Kebbi	The NYSC in Kebbi State launched HIRD in Folade village, Argugu L.G.A and gave free medical treatment for about 500 residents. ²⁷	In October 2017, the Scheme marks the occasion of the HIRD with the support of Kebbi State Govt and the NYSC D.G, Brig. Gen. S. Kazaure
3.	Ogun	The scheme had beneficiaries numbering over 300, which had checks to verify their blood pressure, blood sugar level and eye condition. ²⁸	The HIRD was again flagged-off on 12 th of October 2017 in Ogun State. The D.G then was Brig. Gen. S. Kazaure.

²⁶Webmaster, "NYSC Flags-Off Health Initiative in Kwara", dailytrust.com, Nov. 14, 2014.

²⁷O. Lawal, "Kebbi NYSC Launches Health Initiatives for Rural Dwellers", www.sunnewsonline.com, October 12, 2017.

²⁸The Nation, "NYSC begins Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers in Ogun" ... 2017.

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4.	Nasarawa	Over 500 residents of the comty (Gudi) received treatment for Hypertension, Malaria, Typhoid, Ulcer, Sugar levels and Hepatitis. ²⁹	In 2020, the HIRD showed sensitivity in delivering health service for over 500 rural poor. Brig. Gen. Ibrahim is the current D.G
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Source: Compilation by Author

The table above showed the contribution of the Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers (HIRD) on rural communities prior to the COVID-19 outbreaks. While the initiative was inaugurated in 2014, the D.G Brig. Gen. J. Olawumi, had launched sensitization workshop in Kwara State, a year before its establishment. The scheme has benefited several Nigerians, especially those in core rural community or areas not accessible to health care facilities. This initiative further displayed its readiness to meet public health care need in case of a major disease outbreak in the country. it was with this orientation that the medical Corps members found it easy to prepare and contribute meaningfully in the fight against the current COVID-19 outbreaks from 2019 to date.

Contribution of the Medical Corps Members

The corps members, particularly the medical corps have been applauded for the role played during the COVID-19 lockdown, which lasted for over five months. They received accolades from different sectors of the society fortheir role in combating the spread of the pandemic. While other corps members were away, the NYSC Health sector was fully in the field to aid the Nigerian Healthcare Sector to fight against the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the Anambra

²⁹O. Babalola, "NYSC Medical Team Treats 500 Rural Dwellers in Nasarawa State", www.nnn.ng, January 20, 2020.

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State coordinator of the NYSC, Mr. Kayode Aremu acknowledged this and expressed commendation at an event organized for corps members and officials of the scheme in Anambra State.³⁰ He specifically stated,

I must thank all of you for your tirelessness as well as your commitment to the fight against COVID-19, right from the inception of your service to the point of winding up. You justified the training you received and were active in the partnership between the Scheme and NCDC.³¹

The Medical lab scientists and the Pharmacists, particularly the medical lab scientists were of enormous assistance to the Nigerian Health care Service. They were at the forefront of the Covid-19 team, and in most cases they were exposed to the virus. In Kaduna State, Nasir el-Rufai drafted some members of the NYSC medical team to the State COVID-19 taskforce set up by the State Government.³²They were also at different centers collecting samples and diagnosing suspected patients of the virus. The medical doctors were not allowed to participate in Isolation Centers but where involved in providing healthcare service during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Doctors Strike and the Corps Medical Doctors' Roles during the COVID-19

Nigerian Doctors under the auspices of the National Association of Resident Doctors embarked on an indefinite strike on the 15th of June 2020, during the state wide lockdown established by the Nigerian Government at the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic³³. At this period the

³⁰News Agency of Nigeria, "NYSC Lauds Corps Medical Personnel on Fight against COVID-19", *Guardian Newspaper*, 14 February 2021.

³¹News Agency of Nigeria, "NYSC Lauds Corps Medical Personnel on Fight against COVID-19"... 2021.

³²Interviews with NYSC Coordinator, Kaduna State Secretariat, 18/02/2020.

³³News Agency, "Nigerian Doctors Strike over Lack of PPE, Welfare Concern", www.aljazeera.com/news/6/15, June 15, 2020J.

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Corps members were the ones relied upon to render health service to patients in most of the Federal and State Government hospitals. The medical Corps members, particularly corps doctors were around at the time NARD doctors downed their tools and they attended to patients in government owned hospitals. Although, the strike action did not affect resident doctors in isolation centers but other departments of the health service such as treatment of critical cases, particularly surgeries, among others were affected. However, it was the corps medical doctors that became responsible for taking care of patients in the course of this strike action, and this made many of them to be exposed to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Strike was later called off on the 21st of June 2020 after an intervention from the Federal House of Representatives, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, and the Nigerian Governors' Forum³⁴. Although, respite was rendered to the corps members at the suspension of the Strike action, but this did not last long, the National Association of Resident Doctors went on another strike, specifically on 8 of September 2020³⁵. This time, the medical doctors in the entire Health Sector (including those in the isolation centres) were affected by the Strike. These actions later caused some changes in the directive of the Director General, which gave exception of the corps medical doctors from working in Isolation Centers for the safety of corps members³⁶. With this situation, some states in the Federation sought the services of corps members to work in isolation centers and some of them rendered such services diligently.

³⁴BBC News, "Resident Doctors Strike: Why Nigerian Doctors Call Off Nationwide Strike", www.bbc.com/pidgin, 21 June 2020.

³⁵C. Eboh, "Nigerian Doctors Strike Again over Benefits Amid Coronavirus", www.ruiters.com, September 8 2020.

³⁶Media Assessment, "How we are Rebranding NYSC for Youth Empowerment, Revenue Generation", Exclusive interview of Brig. Shuaibu Ibrahim, D.G, NYSC by Economic Confidential, May 17, 2020, *Leadwatch Publication Ltd.*, 2020, p. 81.

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Health Workers Strike and the Roles of Corps Health Personnel

The NYSC Corps Nurses were also at the forefront of rendering medical services in the course of the lockdown. They were among the members of the scheme that rendered essential services in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in December 2019 and still continuing. Their services were called into use when the Joint Health Staff Union (JOHESU) involved in a nationwide strike on September 25 2020 over non-payment of COVID-19 allowances³⁷. This strike action had come a week after the Nigerian Resident doctors embarked on a nationwide strike. What this mean is that corps nurses, medical laboratory scientists, pharmacists were left providing healthcare services in Federal and State governments' hospitals. The corps members worked in some of these hospitals that were under-staffed, the corps health workers had to be subjected to extra-shift for them to meet up with an overwhelming health care services³⁸. The Corps Healthcare workers in the scheme, apart from the Corps doctors were the unsung heroes in the course of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NYSC Health Sector and Camps' Activities

The NYSC after suspending its orientation course of Batch 'A' Stream One, on March 2020, the Federal Government through the Minister of Youth and Sports, Sunday Dare, declared the reopening of Camp pegging it at November 20, 2020³⁹. The NYSC camps at resumption of Orientation Course, through the National Center for Disease Control provided testing facilities in all the camps of the Federation and testing centers were provided by the scheme with corps members assisting or even manning the testing kits. It was made mandatory for people

³⁷Reuters Staff, "Nigerian Health Workers Strike over Coronavirus Allowances", www.reuters.com, 25th of September 2020.

³⁸Phone Interviews with Nurse Nora Nwabueki, FMC, Asaba, 32, 22/02/2021.

³⁹T. Omilana, "NYSC Orientation Camp gets Resumption Date", www.guardian.ng/news/nysc, 15 October 2020.

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entering the camp to subject themselves to COVID-19 test. The various State coordinators, including the DG subjected themselves to testing before accessing the various camps. According to NYSC Coordinator of Kaduna State:

For example, during the orientation course in November, the D.G went round from one orientation camp to another, such that any camp he enters everybody in his convoy was tested including him before making entry. Particularly, from the Kaduna NYSC Camp to Zamfara Camp, which is about 300km, the D.G and his entourage often subjected themselves to COVID-19 testing in both camps. At one point, the Director General complained to the Kaduna State NYSC coordinator that his nose was already paining him and he was advised to rest.⁴⁰

At the point of entering the camp one must be tested, and once found with the virus, such person won't be allowed into the camp and would be referred to the State Isolation Center. Whether corps members, camp officials or visitors, they must be tested and when found with the virus, they will be referred to the isolation center. The scheme in Kaduna used Durbar Hotel as an isolation center for corps members or staff that tested positive of the virus. Even the Chief Judge of Kaduna State when he came to administer the oath, him and his entourage were subjected to testing, while the cars were decontaminated. The oath papers were decontaminated at the point of entry. The NCDC provided testing facilities and testing kits to NYSC, while the Scheme provided testing centers and take care of the personnel. The Kaduna State

⁴⁰Interviews with the NYSC Coordinator Kaduna State, Mr. Ballama, State Secretariat, 50+, February 18, 2021.

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coordinator exclaimed that they had leftovers of about 3000 kits for the testing of upcoming corps members in the camp⁴¹.

The NYSC does not allow any body into the camp without testing. A case in point was the Kano Camp where one of the NYSC staff was diagnosed with the virus and later died in Isolation center. However, The Vanguard Newspaper reported that the patient had Corona virus in the NYSC camp, which the scheme debunked and said that the story was misleading and that before anybody enters the camp, such a person must be tested at the entrance of the camp and once he or she is tested positive, the person would be referred and transported straight to the isolation center. There had never been any instance that the NYSC found any positive COVID-19 in the camps. All those diagnosed outside the camp and found with the virus were taken to isolation center.

The Challenges of Corps Medical Members during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2020, over 812 health providers were tested positive for the virus⁴² with about 75% of the victims contracting the decease through contact with patience or unknown source. This suggests that corps medical personnel could be victims of the virus from patients they may have come in contact with. This could be seen from testimonies of Doctors undergoing the compulsory one-year NYSC programme, in which theyexpressed dismay on how they were treated by senior colleagues of the profession during the state wide lockdown as a measure in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 pandemic⁴³. Thus, this concern among others became one of the reasons why one could not deny the

⁴¹Interviews with the NYSC Coordinator Kaduna State,

⁴²Nike Adebawale, "Coronavirus: 812 Nigerian Health Workers test Positive – Official", www.premiumtimesng.com, June 2, 2020.

⁴³A. Eboigbe, "NYSC Doctors at the Mercy of COVID-19 Cry Out", *HumAgle*, June 4, 2020.

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fact that corps medical personnel were at the risk of contracting the virus.

Some corps medical doctors have described the challenges of its members in the course of the lockdown, as super-imposition of the staff doctors' duties on them that may have exposed them to the virus because they were seen as junior Doctors who should be active in the Health Sector. The "repressive" nature of the senior Doctors was what an erstwhile corps Doctor, Joshua⁴⁴ regarded as the cause of looming fear among his colleagues, such that there was a common thought between corps Doctors of when will the virus get to them. Another former corps Doctor Dr. Egiliga⁴⁵ described self as a second hand Doctor in the chain of things during the pandemic. While Obinna⁴⁶, referred to the situation as scary, particularly reflecting on an event he was directed to attend to patients without protective equipment. Moreover, even though the corps medical personnel were frontline workers during the lockdown, they were not given additional compensation nor given hazard allowance.

Conclusion

The study conceived the value of leadership qualities in the upgrade of an organization or agency to effectively transform both physical and human resources into delivering a system that may underscore failure and upgrade growth, which is the cardinal means of achieving development. This growth may be seen from the developmental initiatives or structural changes instituted by successive Director Generals of the NYSC scheme, such that these changes have revolutionized the scheme from a uniting or integrative force to a

⁴⁴ Interviews with Dr. Joshua, former NYSC Batch 'A' Stream One, March 2020 – February 2021, 44 Hospital, Kaduna, 29, 18/02/2021.

⁴⁵ Phone Interviews with Dr. Egiliga, Former NYSC 'A' Stream One, March 2020 – February 2021, Central Hospital, Maiduguri, 30, 18/02/2021.

⁴⁶ Interviews with Dr. Obinna, Former NYSC 'A' Stream One, March 2020 – February 2021, Central Hospital, Maiduguri, 30, 18/02/2021.

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responsive agency, which now placed upon youth the sole need for productive capacity. This developmental initiative became one of the reasons the scheme remains a major programme designed for the fulfillment of the Post-Civil War 3Rs, as well as contributing to national development. Specifically, in the Health Sector, the Scheme, with the introduction of the Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers (HIRD) in 2014 became a platform in which the NYSC used to assist the Nigerian Health Sector in the course of the Pandemic.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic, which threatened the global economy, particularly stagnating economic activities around the world, and the Nigerian economy and its social infrastructure were almost brought to its knees. This occasioned the abrupt suspension of the NYSC Batch 'A' Orientation Course in early March 2020 to curb the spread of the virus to NYSC camps and the nation in general. The show of leadership by the DG, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim, especially by instructing the State coordinators to engage corps members in the production of facemasks, face shields, sanitisers, antiseptic soap, automated hand washing machine among others as an effort for the fight against the spread of the pandemic projected the scheme and led to the safe reopening of the Orientation camps. Thus, the study established that the roles of corps medical personnel couldn't be over-emphasised, such that the corps members had to provide extra service after Doctors and the Joint Health Service Union (JOHESU) went on strike during the lockdown.

Lastly, the study established that even though corps medical personnel faced enormous challenges in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the corps members yielded to the clarion call of service to the nation and humanity.

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**An Appraisal of the National Youth Service Corps
Medical Team and Humanitarian Action in Nigeria**

Itodo, Unekwu Friday

Introduction

The National Youth Service Corps was formed soon after the Nigerian civil war to heal the wounds of the war by uniting people from different regions. Except for the national football team, the only thing known to bring Nigerians together, regardless of tribe or religion, is the National Youth Service Corps.

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This noble scheme is undoubtedly still relevant and can be used to strengthen concerted efforts being streamlined in the current fight against insecurity and corruption. Whenever there are areas in need of emergency assistance and skilled services, the program will enter to fill the gap especially in the socio-economic sector and will continue to play a role in helping to keep the nation united. This paper will now review the intervention of the National Youth Service Corps Medical Team and Humanitarian Action in Nigeria. For the purpose of clarity, the Medical team mentioned throughout refers to corps members.

Theoretical Framework. - Kant's Moral Theory

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argued that the highest moral principle is the standard of equality that he calls the "categorical Imperative" (CI). Kant has identified the CI as a goal, a necessary and unconditional requirement that humans must always pursue without the natural desires or tendencies humans may have in the opposite direction. All specific ethical requirements, according to Kant, are permissible in this regard, which means that all misconduct is unreasonable because it violates the CI. Other philosophers, such as Hobbes, Locke, and Aquinas, also agreed with Kant that morals are based on awareness and commonsense.¹

Kant's analysis of commonsense ideas begins with the idea that the only good thing without degrees is "goodwill". While the terms "good-hearted", "good-natured" and "well-meaning" are common, "goodwill" as Kant thinks, is not the same as any of these common ideas. The concept of goodwill is close to the concept of "a good person", or, more importantly, a "good-hearted person". This use of the word "will" at the

¹Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Kants moral philosophy. 2016.
plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/

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beginning of the analysis of general moral thought illustrates the recent and technological discussions about the nature of rational agency.²

Kant's analysis of the general concepts of "duty" and "goodwill" led him to believe that humans are free and independent as long as the character, in itself, was not deceptive. Yet in the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant once again tried to show that every event has its cause. Kant recognized that there seemed to be a deep conflict between the two claims: If the causal determinism was valid at the time, it would seem, we could not have the kind of freedom considered morally, which is a "kind" that "works, without the causes of others, determining it".³

According to Kant, the only way to resolve this apparent conflict was to distinguish between things, which we know from experience, and noumena, which we can always think of but do not know by experience. Kant said the infinite time of perfection (immortality) and the achievement of equality (God-guaranteed) is an "assumption" that is necessary for a reason when employed in moral matters. Some commentators interpret Kant as a stout moral realist (Ameriks 2003; Wood 1999; Langton 2007; Kain 2004). According to the philosophers, Kant's well-intentioned view begins with the claim that intelligence is objective, neutral, and insignificant.

Contrary to what many critics think, Kant is not opposed to happiness. One can do something to be happy as long as it is moral. Kant says, "you have to do things that make you happy as long as you make sure they are not immoral (that is, incompatible with work), and that you would avoid them if they were immoral... a good person is a person who always does their job because it is their job". To be a good person one

²Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Kants moral philosophy. 2016. plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/

³*Practical Philosophy*, translated by Mary Gregor, 1996. Includes: "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?", *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *The Metaphysics of Morals*.

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must have or do "good" for the sake of "goodness." This theory is adopted because it emphasizes that humans must do the right thing through been moral which in-turn means not been greedy and loving others. It fits the ongoing work because it preaches good did and the spirit of humanity.⁴

Conceptual Clarification -Humanitarian Action

The definition of the term 'humanitarian' is an extensive one. As analyzed in an associated HPG operating Paper, even though the term dates back to the 19th century, 'a historic research of the term "humanitarian" is made complex because it was in the last decade of the 20th century that it is commonly known'.⁵ In effect, the knowledge of 'humanitarian' that became dominant in the 1990s has sought to outline 'humanitarianism' as 'the impartial, unbiased, and neutral provision of remedy to the ones in immediate risk of damage'⁶

A humanitarian is someone who actively engages in promoting human welfare and social reforms, and who has no prejudice with human struggling on grounds of gender, sexual orientation, spiritual or countrywide divisions. A humanitarian's purpose is to save lives, relieve struggling, and preserve human dignity. this could be accomplished within the form of rescuing and presenting safety for refugees, imparting haven and meals for the homeless, or assisting human beings inside the aftermath of natural screw-ups or civil

⁴Kant, Immanuel. "Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals." Abbot, Thomas & Lara, Denis.

⁵Eleanor Davey, John Borton and Matthew Foley, 2013.A history of the humanitarian system Western origins and foundations. HPG Working Paper June 2013. www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8439.pdf

⁶Barnett, M. (2005) 'Humanitarianism Transformed', Perspectives on Politics, vol. 3, no. 4.

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unrest.⁷ Humanitarians fight disease, starvation, and violence in a number of the maximum inhospitable situations, locations, and climates and they persevere notwithstanding the dangers of kidnappings, demise threats, homicide, and other lethal and abusive behaviour from the groups they work inside.⁸

From the above, it is clear that humanitarian action is an urgent, coordinated effort to get emergency aid to disaster-affected groups. This may encompass emergency meals, hospital therapy, shelter, and so on. A humanitarian action regularly includes the international humanitarian zone, consisting of the UN, donor agencies, governments and others.⁹ OECD said humanitarian action must be based totally on strong, same, and principled partnerships with NGOs and multilateral groups.¹⁰ For the ongoing work, it is germane to adopt the definition of The Principles and Practices of Good Humanitarian Donorship. According to principles and good practice of humanitarian donorship Endorsed in Stockholm, 17 June 2003 by Germany, Australia, Belgium, Canada, the European Commission, Denmark, the United States, Finland, France, Ireland, Japan, Luxemburg, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Switzerland:

⁷Careerexplorer. what does a humanitarian do?

www.careerexplorer.com/careers/humanitarian/

⁸ Careerexplorer . what does a humanitarian do?

www.careerexplorer.com/careers/humanitarian/

⁹Jacobo Quintanilla, Jesse Hardman, Matt Abud, Alison Campbell and Deborah Ensor. Reporting On Humanitarian Crises: A Manual for Trainers & Journalists and an Introduction for Humanitarian Workers. MANUAL HANDOUTS. 2014. retrieved from: <http://eleuve.carbonmade.com>

¹⁰OECD. Towards Better Humanitarian Donorship 12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews humanitarian action: saving lives, alleviating human suffering and maintaining human dignity. Accsed on 12/12/2019 from:

<https://www2.wpro.who.int/internet/files/eha/toolkit/web/Technical%20References/Aid%20and%20Humanitarian%20Assistance/Principles%20Good%20Practice%20Humanitarian%20Donorship.pdf>

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Humanitarian action is to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations. Humanitarian action should be guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, meaning the centrality of saving human lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found; impartiality, meaning the implementation of actions solely based on need, without discrimination between or within affected populations; neutrality, meaning that humanitarian action must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute where such action is carried out; and independence, meaning the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold concerning areas where humanitarian action is being implemented. Humanitarian action includes the protection of civilians and those no longer taking part in hostilities, and the provision of food, water and sanitation, shelter, health services, and other items of assistance, undertaken for the benefit of affected people and to facilitate the return to normal lives and livelihoods.¹¹

Peering Through the Background of NYSC

The history of NYSC cannot be illuminated without peering into the circumstances that led to the Nigerian civil war. After the attainment of independence from the colonial masters, Nigerian leaders still kept the country united.

¹¹Gppi.net. (2019). Principle of humanitarian donorship.
[Https://www.gppi.net/issue-area/humanitarian-action](https://www.gppi.net/issue-area/humanitarian-action)

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Following an unfortunate civil war, Gowon, in an effort to rebuild the nation, started what came to be known as 3R's- Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, and Reconciliation. It was with a vision to attain the 3Rs that Gowon in 1973 through Decree No. 24, established the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC). The program aims to promote common ties among the youth, as well as to sustain national unity.

Rate it, the NYSC Scheme was established to promote National Consciousness and Patriotism among Nigerian youth, empowering young Nigerian students to work with peers from outside their communities and allow them to live and work in a non-Native community. Through a well-coordinated framework, the ultimate goal of the programme is to promote Unity and national Integration.¹²

The National Youth Service Corps Medical Team and Humanitarian Action in Nigeria

The NYSC medical team has been great in carrying out humanitarian activities in Nigeria. In 2014, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) established the free healthcare delivery for the aged and less-privileged persons in rural communities called the Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers (HIRD). The idea of bringing free health care to the grassroots was necessitated by the lack of access to quality health care in rural communities. The HIRD program mobilizes medical volunteers in providing health care through diagnostic, therapeutic, referral, and appropriate preventive measures. It was hoped that it would help enhance the general well-being of rural communities in Nigeria. In the words of a former Director-General of NYSC, Brig.-Gen. Suleiman Kazaure:

The HIRD is another community-based program designed among other things to support the various

¹²History of NYSC- national youth service corp. 2020. funloaded.org.ng/history-of-nysc/

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State Governments in the drive toward the provision of healthcare for all. As managers of the scheme, we are fully prepared to leverage the well-spread abundant human resource at our disposal to improve the quality of life of our people. Our team of experienced medical personnel are sure of giving you standard medical services for your general well-being; so feel free to engage them. Our confidence in the success of the program lies in our partners and stakeholders who are either assisting us with personnel or providing support with drugs and medical equipment. I hope that our efforts in enhancing the quality of life of our people through this program will endure and be improved upon over the years.”¹³

The initiative has maintained its goals and had a profound impact on needy communities in Nigeria. In Kwara for example, the Team cared for the health needs of 527 people. 520 were treated and others were followed up, and two were referred. The examined cases included - malaria, high blood pressure, diarrhea, high blood sugar, arthritis, upper respiratory infections, peptic ulcer,¹⁴ and in Ogun state, the group catered to more than 1,000 people.¹⁵ Many were treated and 500 people were also given counselling in Nasarawa.¹⁶ in Lagos, more than

¹³News Agency of Nigeria. NYSC commences health initiative for rural dwellers in Ogun. 2017. www.today.ng/news/nigeria/nysc-commences-health-initiative-rural-dwellers-ogun-21969

¹⁴Splufik. National Youth Service Corps Health Innitiative for Rural Dwellers (HIRD) Profile Introduction. mrsplufik.blogspot.com/2015/10/full-information-about-national-youth.html

¹⁵News Agency of Nigeria. NYSC commences health initiative for rural dwellers in Ogun. 2017. www.today.ng/news/nigeria/nysc-commences-health-initiative-rural-dwellers-ogun-21969

¹⁶Sunnews. NYSC medical team treats 500 rural dwellers in Nasarawa State. www.sunnewsonline.com/nysc-medical-team-treats-500-rural-dwellers-in-nasarawa-state/

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200 people were provided with medical care; 10 (Ten) people were diagnosed with malaria, 3 (Three) had high Random Blood Sugar (RBS), 47 (Forty-seven) had high BP, five (five) cataract patients were taken care of 47 (Forty-seven) were being treated for malaria, as the drugs were given equally and treated free of charge.¹⁷

Aside from the initiative, many corps members have combined compassion with character as thorough-bred professionals. They undertake viable community development projects to impact the lives of their host states. For instance, a Corps Member, Dr. Vincent Chidera FC/20A/0002, donated a four-room public convenience to the Dakwa community in the Bwari Local Government Area of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

The project was driven by a desire to provide a solution to the health care problems facing the community and to improve their quality of life. Chidera, who also donated buckets, mattresses, rubber slips, among other things, added that before his donation, poor male residents of the Dakwa community were prone to contracting diseases because they defecated inside the gutters. There are numerous such life-impacting projects all over the country executed by corps members.¹⁸

The National Youth Service Corps has partnered with other agencies globally, nationally, and locally in many areas of human and social development needs to meet national and international challenges especially in the health sector. Corps members serve as independent monitors during poliomyelitis vaccination in the country. They also participate in public awareness campaigns to vaccinate against deadly

¹⁷Dayo Adesulu. NYSC takes health initiative to rural dwellers. vanguard.2015.
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/02/nysc-takes-health-initiative-to-rural-dwellers/>

¹⁸www.facebook.com/officialnysc/posts/3617937224955446.

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diseases such as polio, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, tuberculosis and malaria control, diarrhea, etc.¹⁹

The National Youth Service Corps has community development groups that also carry out a number of humanitarian action in the health area. The CDS is the general and basic group that every corps member is expected to participate in on weekly basis. The CDS group members are expected to meet together and carry out programs that would benefit their host community. The services they render are based on the name and objective of the group towards themselves and to their host community. It is important to note that group CDS is compulsory and varies from local government to local government. I believe the CDS groups are selected according to the needs and practicality of the CDS group to the host community. The skills, abilities, or qualifications of the corps members are also considered in assigning them to a group. In these weekly CDS meetings, certain protocols are held. These meeting procedures and interactions serve to be a good ground to inculcate a part of management and relationship skills to corps members. Examples of the CDS groups working in the medical area are Charity, Red Cross, and Social Welfare. These CDS group members set aside dates that the group visit hospitals, charity homes, and correctional to present items bought by the money donated by the corps members to the sufferings. Sometimes, their donations are boosted further by good Samaritans living in the host community or faith-based organisation.²⁰ These are special community service groups formed in collaboration with business organizations, national and international agencies through the NYSC to carry out a different project or to increase their publicity.

¹⁹www.nysc.gov.ng/programs.html

²⁰ Awajis. NYSC Community Development Service. November 18, 2020.
awajis.com/community-development-service-cds/

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As Covid-19 reduces global economic activity in an unprecedented way, stakeholders in the health sector around the world have taken drastic measures to reduce the effects of the epidemic. In Nigeria, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) plays a major role, especially in rural areas, where corps members are all over the 774 local government areas. Corps members did not disappoint as they unleash their expertise in the production and distribution of free palliative facilities as part of the NYSC Community Development Service (CDS) program. For example, in Abuja, FCT State Minister Hajia Ramatu Tijjani Aliyu applauded NYSC Corps members for their skills in contributing to the fight against Corona virus. She made a compliment while receiving Face Masks, Liquid Soaps, and Hand Sanitizers produced by Abuja corps members from FCT NYSC Coordinator, Hajia Walida Siddique Isa.²¹

Corps members were also at the forefront in Niger state. To help curb the spread of COVID-19, Corps members at the NYSC Garment Factory located in Minna, Niger State Capital, donated 1,000 face masks to the State Government. It was done with the consent of the host community as a development process. The Commissioner for Youth and Sports Development in the state, Mr. Emmanuel Umar, while receiving building materials from the NYSC State Coordinator, Mrs. Funmilayo Ajayi, expressed his gratitude to the corps members for showed patriotism, during the struggle against the devastating epidemic.²²

In Ogun State, Governor Dapo Abiodun commended the NYSC in the state for its concerted efforts in combating the deadly plague of COVID-19, particularly in public awareness areas, the provision of liquid soaps,

²¹Tomori Uriel and Isa I. Gagarawa. "COVID19: As NYSC's Community Engagement Boosts Nigeria's Response." *Economic Confidential*.April 30, 2020.

economicconfidential.com/2020/04/nysc-community-engagement-boosts-nigeria/

²²Tomori Uriel and Isa I. Gagarawa. "COVID19: As NYSC's Community Engagement Boosts Nigeria's Response." *Economic Confidential*.April 30, 2020.

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masks, and cosmetics to the government. A donation of 300 pieces of 600ml of liquid soap, 636 pieces of 100ml hand sanitizer, 1126 pieces of face mask, and noodle boxes were received on behalf of Governor Abiodun, by the Commissioner for Special Affairs, Barr. Olufemi Adeleke Ogunbanwo, and the Commissioner, Budget and Planning, Mr. Olaolu Olabintan. Inform Corps medical staff of staying in the State, or facing imminent danger, to support the Government's health sector in the fight against COVID-19. The State Government added that it is aware of all the efforts of other Corps Members who have visited the office to donate; face masks, hand sanitizers, liquid soaps, and food items, all to contribute to the fight against COVID-19.²³

In a humanitarian action against the epidemic, members of the Oyo State NYSC built a hand washing machine equipped with a metal detergent and an underground water supply system. Oyo State NYSC Coordinator, Mrs. Grace Ogbuogebe revealed this while presenting boxes of alcohol-based cleaners, hand-washing, and masks, made by corps members to the government represented by Youth and Sports Commission, Mr. Seun Fakoredeand Dr. Bashir Bello.

At the same time, corps members of Kebbi State sprayed the environment as part of their contribution to preventing the spread of Coronavirus. NYSC State Coordinator in Zamfara, Namalam Mohammed Taura, approved a Corps Member's grant from the Community Development Service Group to build an automatic hand washing machine for the Secretariat.²⁴

In a nearby State, Sokoto NYSC Coordinator, Mr. Philip Enaberue, said corps members in the state designed and built a special water-based

²³Tomori Uriel and Isa I. Gagarawa. "COVID19: As NYSC's Community Engagement Boosts Nigeria's Response."

²⁴Tomori Uriel and Isa I. Gagarawa. "COVID19: As NYSC's Community Engagement Boosts Nigeria's Response."

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hand washing system to combat COVID-19. He stated it while washing his hands and masks with the Chairman of the Sokoto Taskforce Committee on COVID-19 and the Commissioner of Health, Dr. Ali Inname. Corps members in Lagos, Taraba, Ebonyi among other states have also donated the same relief supplies to various institutions fighting the epidemic.²⁵

The corps member's efforts were loud that it was acknowledged by the president. The President commended the members for their efforts to clean up the process of promoting the Scheme, the President instructed NYSC management to ensure that only those who meet the required conditions participate in the one-year national work. He celebrated the Nigerian youth in the National Service for focusing directly on leading the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic. The president also noted that the ingenuity and resilience of Nigerian youth, demonstrated by members of the Service Corps in the production of face masks, hand sanitizers, liquid soap, and several hand-made machines, contributed to curbing the epidemic. He said, "The significant contributions that Service Corps members make to the improvement of our education, health and social services and rural development remain a shining foundation for the Scheme. This has produced successive generations of Corps members as real development workers."²⁶

Conclusion

The NYSC should be encouraged rather than a call for its end. Nigeria is a complex and diverse country. This is glaring in the number of tribes, languages, religions, cultures and beliefs, ideas, etc. all of which make the world a diverse place. Suffice it to say that the NYSC was established for the purpose of uniting the country. It was intended that young people from different ethnic groups, as a matter of policy should

²⁵Tomori Uriel and Isa I. Gagarawa. "COVID19: As NYSC's Community Engagement Boosts Nigeria's Response."

²⁶www.facebook.com/officialnysc/posts/3617937224955446.

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have a strong bond by working and living together, getting to know each other, understand, tolerate and coexist or even marry; it therefore achieved that goal of integration.

Apart from this, in the last decades, the number of humanitarian needs in the health sector has tripled. The deterioration of health services in many communities in the country, caused by maladministration, conflict, the spread of HIV / AIDS, Ebola, chronic ulcer and the emergence of drug-resistant Tuberculosis (TB) and other related infections exacerbate the effects of these diseases. There is a strong correlation between the diseases mentioned above and humanitarian crisis.

The need for a systematic response to public health challenges has long been recognized. Epidemics - for example - can challenge national health systems, contribute significantly to morbidity and mortality, disrupt economic activity and development, and because of their potential to cause massive deaths and widespread social unrest, are the causes of emergency situations.

The NYSC has always come to the rescue of vulnerable people. This was evident when uncertainty persisted in the face of a rare global problem of the corona virus, the NYSC asserted itself as a problem solver by providing a solution through the production and distribution of anti-covid-19 prevention and safety materials.

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Interventions of Corps Members in Nigeria's Healthcare Sector

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**Interventions of Corps Members in Nigeria's
Healthcare Sector**

Thaddeus T. Ityonzughul
and
Asor Gbamwuan

Introduction

There is a popular adage that health is wealth. An American Philosopher, Waldo Emerson in 1960 notes that "the first wealth is health".¹Emerson's was also cited by Harvard Economist and health

¹Waldo Emerson Quoted in Ananya Bhatt, The Random Vibez Quotes, Memes and Sayings, available at <https://www.therandomvibez.com/health-issues> (Accessed on February 02, 2021).

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expert David E. Bloom in his article titled "The Shape of Global Health", reminds us that good health is the foundation on which to build a happy life, a community, and economy.² Contributing to this matter, Mahatma Gandhi reveals that, "it is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver while Josh Billings discloses that health is like money, we never have a true idea of its value until we lose it."³

The above gives an insight into the importance of health to mankind. It is the consciousness of man's health that led to the establishment of the healthcare sector to deal with health challenges and other related issues.

Healthcare is the improvement or maintenance of health through prevention, diagnosis, treatment, recovery, or care of diseases, illness, injury, and other physical or mental challenges in people.⁴ Healthcare is delivered by health professionals and allied health fields. Medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, midwifery, nursing, optometry, audiology, psychology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, athletic training, and other health professionals are all part of healthcare.⁵ In Nigeria, the development and progress of the healthcare sector have been hampered by inadequate personnel, lack of modern healthcare facilities, and penchant attitude of health workers, among others. Given the above scenario, many agencies, parastatals, and schemes including the National Youth Service Corps (hereafter NYSC) have intervened to put the Nigerian healthcare sector on a sound footing. In this wise, many studies have been done on Nigeria's healthcare sector. However,

²David E. Bloom 'The Shape of Global Health', in Finance and Development (Vol. 51, No.4, 2014),1.

³Josh Billings cited in Ananya Bhatt, The Random Vibez Quotes, Memes...

⁴New York and Presbyterian Hospital, 'Tax Exempt Organization Search' *Internal Revenue Service* available at <https://www.therandomvibez.com/health-issues> (Accessed on February 02, 2021).

⁵[www.yourdictionary.com>healthcare](http://www.yourdictionary.com/healthcare)(Accessed on February 02, 2021).

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nothing much has been done on the role of the NYSC in the healthcare sector in Nigeria.

This chapter thus serves as an intervention to close the gap by contributing to the scanty extant literature that exists on the phenomenon by analysing the intervention of Corps members in Nigeria's healthcare sector. To achieve this aim, the chapter is structurally divided into sections. Besides the introduction, there is a section on the establishment of the NYSC. The next section discusses the contributions of Corps members to the healthcare sector in Nigeria. The succeeding section examines the challenges of Corps members in their quest of offering healthcare services in Nigeria. The last part carries a conclusion and proposals on the way forward. All these have been done with the aid of interdisciplinary methodology using both primary and secondary sources of data collection.

Contributions of the NYSC to Healthcare Sector in Nigeria

NYSC has made viable contributions to Nigeria's healthcare sector through the provision of medical services to the citizenry. As a standing policy, Corps members of the medical profession after completion of three weeks of mandatory camp training are posted to the health sector (Teaching/Tertiary Hospitals, General Hospitals, Primary Health Centres, Primary Health Clinics, and Health Posts) to render their selfless services to the nation. These professionals are made up of medical doctors, pharmacists, nurses, laboratory scientists, physiotherapists, dentists, ophthalmologists among others. They handle different kinds of sickness ranging from simple to complex ones. Apart from their places of primary assignments, medical professionals also render their services through Community Development projects. They execute these projects under the guidance of Community Development Service and Special Projects Department. The mission and goal of this department is to enhance the living standard of the host communities and also improve their economic, health, political, and

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socio-cultural conditions towards sustainable development.⁶ The department has different special projects including Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome/Combating Ebola Virus disease Unit (HIV/AIDS/COMEVID). The unit is in corroboration with renowned health agencies and organisations like Mercy Corps Nigeria, United Nations Children Education Funds (UNICEF), National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Sustainable Development Goals (OSSAP SDGs), National Primary Healthcare Development Agency (NPHDA), United Nations Millennium Campaign Office (UNMC), Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), and Yakubu Gowon Centre on Hepatitis disease *et cetera*.⁷

Some of the health-related programmes carried out by the HIV/AIDS/COMEVID Unit are NYSC/HIV/AIDS Advocacy Programme. Its major area of operation covers the sensitisation and training of HIV/AIDS PETs. The funding of the training was taken over by the NYSC Management with effect from the 2014 Batch 'B' Orientation Course due to the expiration of the funding agreement with major partners – UNICEF and its subsidiaries like Association for Reproductive and Family Health (ARFH) and Society for Family Health (SFH).⁸ There is also the Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers (HIRD) which was launched in November 2014 and flagged off in Kwara State by the then Director-General of NYSC, Brig-Gen J.B. Olawumi. Under the programme, a nationwide one-week medical outreach was carried out in September 2015. The medical outreach is planned to hold quarterly nationwide. Also, the NYSC/NPHDA partnership on Combating Ebola Virus Disease (NYSC COMEVID) has been involved in the sensitisation/campaigns on the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) across the

⁶<https://www.nysc.gov.ng/cds.html>, (accessed on March 02, 2021).

⁷<https://www.nysc.gov.ng/cds.html>, (accessed on March 02, 2021).

⁸<https://www.nysc.gov.ng/cds.html>, (accessed on March 02, 2021).

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country. There are equally Sensitisation/campaigns against malaria and tuberculosis through NYSC partnership with NPHCDA and other partners.⁹

Through the above-mentioned initiatives, NYSC had made various contributions to the Nigerian healthcare sector in diverse ways. Firstly, in the area of free medical outreach and sensitisation, the HIRD has played a very crucial role, accordingly:

The scheme has a crop of energetic, skilled volunteer corps medical personnel (medical doctors, pharmacists, nurses, laboratory scientists, physiotherapists, dentists, ophthalmologists, *et cetera*) who serve as intervention agents in all the 774 Local Government Areas of the country. They are disposed to providing correct information and medical palliatives to Nigerians in every nook and cranny of the country if provided with the logistics and medical facilities.¹⁰

The HIRD has been tirelessly working across the length and breadth of Nigeria. Only in 2014 when the scheme was flagged off, it was able to attend to the health needs of over 527 persons in Kwara State. 520 persons were treated and some being followed up, while two were referred. Cases investigated include malaria, hypertension, typhoid, blood sugar level, arthritis, upper respiratory infection, peptic ulcer, and so forth.¹¹ In Lagos State, the HIRD outreach programme in 2014 was held at Ese-Offin community Primary School where residents of Egan-Oromi, Itogbesa, Ojota, Ishagira, and Ese-Ofin communities under Otto-Awori immensely benefited. No fewer than 63,864 persons with various ailments were reached across the country during 2014 in

⁹<https://www.nysc.gov.ng/cds.html>, (accessed on March 02, 2021).

¹⁰https://nysc.gov.ng/downloads/HIRD_PROFILE.pdf, (accessed on March 02, 2021).

¹¹https://nysc.gov.ng/downloads/HIRD_PROFILE.pdf, (accessed on March 02, 2021).

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which the programme was laughed. HIRD scheme has continued to reach interior settlements where free medical services are rendered by Corps members. For instance, in 2017 the NYSC State Coordinator in Zamfara State Hajiya Rahamatu Sanda planned to reach 10, 000 communities through the HIRD scheme. While declaring open the 2017 First Quarter HIRD Scheme at Jaurin Rogo Village in Gusau, the coordinator said that :

"many communities had been selected for this year's programme, which was estimated at 10,000 beneficiaries. In each of the selected communities, we are targeting a large number of beneficiaries... people from rural areas suffered various diseases, saying that many of them had no financial capacity to go to hospitals...That is why the NYSC came up with this initiative to assist people, especially the poor at the grassroots level so that various diseases such as malaria, diabetes, cholera, and typhoid would be treated during the outreach".¹²

HIRD as a quarterly medical outreach has benefited a lot of communities in Nigeria. The Scheme, in conjunction with Grace Projects International, donated over 300 wheelchairs to the less privileged/physically challenged members of the public across the country. Apart from the centrally coordinated outreaches conducted simultaneously nationwide, each NYSC State formation also mobilises the Corps Medical Teams to conduct periodic outreaches to various communities.¹³

¹²NYSC: 10,000 beneficiaries to benefit from health scheme,www.pmnewsnigeria.com(accessed on March 03, 2021).

¹³<https://www.independent.ng/46-years-after-nysc-enrolment-rising-with-decreasing-employment-rate/>, (accessed on March 10, 2021).

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The Drug-Free and Quality Control CDS Group liaises with the NDLEA, NAFDAC, and SON *et cetera* to create awareness on the dangers of drug abuse, eradication of fake and adulterated food and drugs. They also establish drug-free clubs in schools to enhance the awareness of drug abuse among the teenage group.¹⁴

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, NYSC health workers were at the front banner of the sensitisation campaign. They produced and donated free hand sanitizers, liquid soap, face masks, foot-operated water dispensers, and hand washing basins. They also distributed relief materials, and fumigated public places.

Another significant way in which NYSC contributed to the healthcare needs of the Nationis in terms of rendering First Aid services. Corps members in corroboration with the Red Cross Society of Nigeria, Road Safety Corps and other related agencies render support in this area as well. They also make personal donations of first aid materials and road caution signs to assist motorists' consciousness of their safety while driving on the Nigerian roads which are generally bad.¹⁵

Thirdly, the NYSC Corps members have passionately demonstrated their commitments to the healthcare sector through the building, renovation, and equipping of hospitals and clinics in various communities across the nation.¹⁶ In his interview with Premium Times, an ex-corps member, Eguonor-Oghene explained his reason for establishing a health facility in an IDP camp in New Kuchingoro, Abuja through the help of the German Embassy. Eguonor Oghene said:

¹⁴<https://drugxpert.blogspot.com/2020/07/community-development-service-cds.html>, (accessed on March 03, 2021).

¹⁵<https://ncdmb.gov.ng/corp-members-donates-road-caution-sign-first-aid-box-to-ncdmb/>,(accessed on March 09, 2021)

¹⁶<https://www.newscabal.co.uk/nysc-gets-new-clinic-at-oyo-camp>, (accessed on March 10, 2021).

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During one of my visits to the camp as part of my CDS project, I met a 12-year old boy. He was seriously sick but the parents were just there watching him because they could not afford to take him to the hospital or even buy common drugs for him. I felt a sense of responsibility. Since there was no health facility in the camp, a lot of children were sick, shivering, and dying without healthcare and proper awareness, just like the 12-year old boy. So, I now mapped out a plan of rendering free healthcare service to the people in the camp. Fortunately, the next time I visited, the then German President, Joachim Gauck, also visited the camp. So, I met with a member of his entourage and shared my vision. I was told to write a proposal and that was how the health clinic project was funded and executed by the German Embassy. That was how this place came to be.¹⁷

The health facility project is estimated at the cost of N1.9 million. It was executed to provide a free and sustainable solution to malaria and other healthcare diseases that prevail in the IDP camp. Arising from this fact, the project was awarded Best NYSC Project 2015/2016 and was named Gauck IDP Clinic in honour of the German President. The healthcare centre not only treats diseases but also distributes mosquito nets, gives insecticides to IDP occupants, and also constructed an enclosed drainage system to eliminate breeding spots for mosquitoes.¹⁸

¹⁷<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/health/health-interviews/242858-interview-i-got-german-embassy-set-health-clinic-abuja-idp-camp-ex-nysc-member.html>, (accessed on March 10, 2021).

¹⁸<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/health/health-interviews/242858-interview-i-got-german-embassy-set-health-clinic-abuja-idp-camp-ex-nysc-member.html>, (accessed on March 10, 2021).

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Apart from community-based health centers, corps members also setup clinics in some NYSC secretariats to provide services to staff and neighbouring residents. This intervention also has an immense impact on the health care sector.

Arising from the foregoing, Arigbo, Onuekwusi, Ikoro, and Adeogun were right when they observed that among the vital community services rendered by corps members, health care services are substantially recorded. For instance, the campaign against HIV/AIDS is 1st with 69.4%, immunisation campaign is 7th with 43.9%, and operation of mobile clinics is 10th with 18.9%, while promotion of community theatre is 11th with 7.8%.¹⁹In the final analysis, these critical interventions underscore the strategic roles corps members play in contributing to efficient health care delivery in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The summation of this study draws inferences from records of health care services rendered by corps medical personnel of the NYSC. The work acknowledges the imperative of health to humanity. It has shown that there are a lot of benefits that accompany good health and what it can offer. The importance of good health has propelled the establishment of many healthcare delivery institutions in the sector. However, the Nigerian healthcare system is so vast that it requires proper organisation. With multifarious challenges ranging from paucity of funds, inadequate health workers to insufficient standard hospitals and medical equipment, the task is overwhelmingly demanding.

Due to the afore-mentioned debilitating problems, so many interventions are needed to address them. It is in the light of this that

¹⁹ Arigbo P. Obionna, Onuekwusi C. Gideon, Ikoro E. Dorothy, & Adeogun T. Foluke, 'Community Involvement in the National Youth Service Corps Community Development Service Projects in Abia State, Nigeria', in *Journal of Agricultural Extension*, (Vol. 23, No. 4, 2019), 70.

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some agencies and professionals have intervened in the health sector to help in fixing the challenge of inadequate staff and facilities.

This chapter emphasised the roles of Corps members in the health sector in Nigeria. It particularly examined the crucial work undertaken by Corps members in the health sector during their service year. While working in their places of primary assignment, they attended to patients under the supervision of more experienced senior doctors and paramedics. In some instances, Corps members move from place to place in their host communities educating people on relevant health issues like HIV/AIDS, Ebola, Tuberculosis, Cholera, and very recently Corona virus Pandemic (COVID-19). The purpose of doing this is to avert the dangers associated with such diseases and epidemics.

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**Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim:
An Overview of His Achievements as 18th
NYSC Director-General**

Bem Japhet Audu
and
Maryam Hamza

Introduction

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) has attained tremendous height since the assumption of office by Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim as the Director General (DG) of the Scheme. This is not surprising, given the fact that Gen Ibrahim is a thoroughbred military administrator, who combines scholarship, emotional intelligence and finesse in his administrative duties. His experiences cut across administration in the

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military and civil establishments, which combination have accelerated the pace of the modest service rendered to the NYSC.

Key issues that confronted the Scheme upon his assumption of office include the need to sustain the relevance of the NYSC in a fast-changing world; second, inadequate motivation and welfare for Corps Members and staff of the Scheme. The third was the challenge of unemployment among the youths after the mandatory one year national service.

Gen Ibrahim's track record as a visionary leader readily came to play in tackling these challenges. He initiated a five-point policy thrust to address them. These five-point policy thrust include the following:

- Sustain effective utilisation of the potentials of Corps Members for optimal benefit;
- Strengthen existing collaborations with critical stakeholders;
- Improve on the welfare and security of Corps Members and staff;
- Pursue a technologically driven organisation to deepen effective service delivery;
- Reinvigorate the NYSC Ventures and SAED in line with the NYSC Act for greater impact.

It is against this backdrop that this essay examines the achievements of Gen Ibrahim as Director General of the NYSC, using a descriptive approach and evidence -- based study. The paper argues that Gen Ibrahim has not only transformed the NYSC, but has also repositioned it to benefit the Corps Members, members of staff and indeed, the nation at large.

The assumption here is that leadership is a process of galvanising resources to attain group goals. Gen Ibrahim's leadership style has led to the transformation of the NYSC by strengthening the institution, in terms of welfare, security, innovations and technological advancement. Despite these laudable achievements, there have equally been

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challenges. The Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic threatened to derail the activities of the Scheme. As an astute administrator, he rose to the occasion through a robust coordinated response to manage the pandemic that has become a reference point and template for other establishments in the country.

Towards a Biography of General Ibrahim: Trends in his Academic, Military and Administrative Career

Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim (Associate Professor), was born on the 13th July, 1967 and hails from Nasarawa Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. He attended the famous University of Jos where he obtained Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in History (1989 and 1992 respectively), before proceeding to bag a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education from Tai Solar in University of Education, Ijebu Ode, Ogun State. Driven by his tenacity to acquire knowledge, he went on to obtain a Ph.D in History from the University of Abuja in 2007.

Since his commissioning into the Nigerian Army, he has served in various capacities in military formations across the country. His appointments and postings include: The Institute of Army Education (Research Officer). Researched and produced Nigerian Army Journals and Briefs for the Nigerian Army in particular, and the Military in general; NYSC (Military Assistant to the Director General) 1997-1999; Nigerian Defence Academy (Taught 100 and 200 Levels 2000-2004; National Defence College (Staff Officer I Military History 2004-2009; Headquarters Nigerian Army School of Education (Senior Instructor) 2009-2011; Commandant Command Secondary School, Suleja 2012-2014; Nigerian Defence Academy (Head of Department, History and War Studies), 2015-2018; and Registrar, Nigerian Army University, Biu, Borno State(2018-2019).

Brigadier General S Ibrahim is a scholar of high repute, who authored, co-authored, edited, co-edited and contributed articles/chapters to numerous books and academic Journals.

Despite his tight schedule, Brig Gen S Ibrahim still devotes time to academic work, including the supervision of students' thesis and

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dissertations, serving as Internal and External Examiner of Master's Students at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria and the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim was appointed 18th Director General of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and assumed the leadership of the Corps on 10th May, 2019. This ushered in a transformation era for the Scheme which has not only been a source of immense benefit to the Service Corps, but the entire country in general.

The General also had a cluster of completed courses in the military, and excelled in these courses. Brig Gen Ibrahim is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigeria Defence Academy, Kaduna. These feats in both military and academic trainings, as well as experience in service are what marked him out as a visionary, seasoned and ingenious administrator.

Since assumption of duty as the Director General of the NYSC, the media has been awash with burgeoning records of his strides. His vision for the Scheme informed his decision to roll out a five-point policy thrust, geared towards utilising the potentials of the Corps Members maximally. Since assumption of duty at the NYSC, his pragmatic leadership skill has set the Scheme on the path of rejuvenation and continuous relevance. Like his predecessors, he came up with robust and ambitious programmes, aimed at repositioning the Scheme as a self-sufficient and revenue -- generating government organisation.

This chapter will attempt an appraisal of the delivery of these specific goals by the administration of Gen S Ibrahim within a short period of two years, in spite of the huge challenges facing the Scheme.

Sustain effective utilisation of the potentials of Corps Members for optimal benefit.

The successful conduct of the 2019 NYSC Sports and Cultural Festivals is a remarkable achievement of the Director General in harnessing the

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huge potentials of the Corps Members for national development. The NYSC Sports and Cultural Festivals serve as one of the veritable avenues through which the Scheme promotes national unity, cultural integration, as well as showcasing the abundant talents of Corps Members in the areas of sports and culture for gainful employment in the sports and film industries. The Festivals were revived by the present management. The grand finale was held in Abuja. Not only that, measures were put in place to ensure that the event holds annually.

Another success of the NYSC Director General is the production of an NYSC movie titled "A Call to Service" currently undergoing post production work. Apart from its entertainment value, the movie is being packaged to create public awareness on the roles of stakeholders to the Scheme. These stakeholders include the three tiers of government, Corps employers, as well as serving and prospective Corps Members. Ultimately, the film will promote better understanding of the Scheme to the public, in addition to sensitising them on their expected roles to the Scheme.

Another noteworthy achievement of the Director General is the establishment of NYSC National Cultural Troupe. This initiative is to provide a veritable platform for Corps Members to develop their talents in drama and cultural dance, while also eliciting public support towards harnessing such talents through private and corporate patronage. Remarkably, the NYSC Cultural Troupe will also shore up the revenue base of the Scheme through its activities which will be commercialised.

In the same vein, the NYSC Director General has successfully organised a National Anti-Corruption Walk. This is in furtherance of the NYSC's contributions to the fight against corruption through the activities of the Corps Anti-Corruption and Integrity CDS Group. The programme involved the participation of thousands of Corps Members in the first ever nationwide rally/road walk organised by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development on 14th February, 2020.

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The Director-General personally joined the Corps Members and officials in Kano State for the rally, which was tagged “Nigerian Youths March Against Corruption.”

This action further boosted the commitment of the NYSC in eradicating corruption and promotion of good moral and ethical values in the country.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic nearly crippled the global socio-economic activities and did not spare the Scheme. The 2020 Batch “A” Orientation Course was suspended barely eight days into the programme. However, the ever resourceful and proactive Director General challenged the creative ingenuity of Corps Members who responded appropriately to the challenge by producing non-pharmaceutical intervention materials such as face-mask, liquid soap, alcohol - based hand sanitiser and donated same to the indigent populace across the length and breadth of the country.

Under the leadership of Gen Ibrahim, the NYSC has also carried out public awareness campaigns on containment measures for the dreaded virus. The initiative of the Director General was later adopted by some public institutions.

Another innovative contribution of the NYSC in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic is the fabrication of foot-operated water, liquid soap and hand sanitizer dispenser by individual Corps Members in several States.

For instance, Babatunde Dolapo Dayo and Sebe Godspower - Abia State; Abdullahi Sani - Kano; Abdulsalam Abubakar and Obiefuna Ebuka - Kwara; Adeyanju Adeyemi, Afolabi Victor, Ogunmoye Victor - Oyo and Onyekwere Chiwotaoke – Zamfara and Ilori Deborah - FCT were among the Corps Members that fabricated and donated the devices.

In addition, Corps Members, acting on the platform of Charity CDS/SDGs Group, have been contributing towards mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 at the grassroots, through the donation of food and

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other relief items to State and Local Governments, as well as indigent members of the society. These strategies by the Director General paved the way for the Scheme to obtain approval from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to resume full operations, especially the Orientation Course.

Relatedly, several Corps Members on teaching assignment also contributed towards sustaining the educational progress of their students by adopting virtual teaching approach while schools remained closed as a result of the pandemic.

As per the pursuit of a technologically-driven organisation to deepen effective service delivery, the Director-General recently conducted the first ever video conference with the 2021 Batch 'A' Stream 1 Corps Members in all the 37 Orientation Camps. It was an avenue to interface with thousands of Corps Members simultaneously, in line with COVID-19 safety protocols. He has sustained this initiative by periodically holding virtual meetings with serving Corps Members, as well as NYSC State Coordinators across the country.

It is gratifying to disclose that the Director General's interface with National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) has ensured the equipping of the NYSC Rivers Secretariat with computers by the agency. That singular gesture has in no small measure deepened the proficiency of Corps Members and staff members in the area of Information technology.

The Chief Executive introduced the inscription of date of birth on the Certificate of National Service and Exclusion Letter, beginning with the 2019 Batch "A" Corps Members and 2019 Batch "C" respectively. This is in a bid to check the manipulation of date of birth by ineligible persons seeking mobilisation for National Service, and it has had a positive effect in checkmating the falsification of records for employment, visa, political appointments, among others.

Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim conceptualised and designed a state-of-the-art ICT Office for the Scheme. The design had already been forwarded

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to the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) and Federal Ministry of Works and Housing for approval. The cost of construction was appropriated in the 2021 Budget, and the Scheme is awaiting the release of funds for its commencement.

Other laudable efforts by Gen Ibrahim to deepen effective service delivery include, the development of a Five-Year Strategic Development Plan for the Scheme, review of the NYSC Composite Policy Document and documentation of the activities of the Scheme, all aimed at positioning the Scheme as a research hub for academics and the general public.

Under his watch, the Federal Government drafted the NYSC into the Presidential Steering Committee on Alternate School Programme. The inclusion of the Corps in the Committee is in recognition of the invaluable contributions of the Scheme to national development, particularly in the sphere of Education.

NYSC is a repository of talents, parading the most enlightened class of Nigerian youths, who in forty - eight years of the Scheme's existence have continued to make varying degrees of multi-sectoral contributions to the growth and well-being of the nation.

Therefore, the inclusion of the Scheme, whose visibility has been top-notch in the last two years as member of the Mambila Hydro Power Project speaks on the high premium the Federal Government places on the Corps.

Undoubtedly, membership of these august bodies have clearly underscored the high pedestal the Director General has taken the Scheme in his two years of his eventful and remarkable administration.

In respect of improving the welfare and security of Corps Members and staff, in a rare demonstration of empathy and commitment to the welfare of Corps Members, the Director General personally visited and encouraged Corps Member Saidu Mohammed Adamu, who was admitted at the Federal Teaching Hospital, Ado-Ekiti, as a result of gunshot injuries that he sustained while on election duties during the

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recent bye-election held in Ekiti East Local Government Area of Ekiti State in March 2021.

Similar visits were also paid to several members of the Service Corps on admission in hospitals in Sokoto, Katsina, Edo, Plateau, Taraba and Kwara States, among others, following their involvement in road traffic accidents.

The Director General has also paid condolence and reassuring visits to the families of deceased and missing Corps Members in Plateau, Kaduna and Edo States. Such gestures have increased the confidence of Corps Members and their families in the Scheme, and have also engendered more zeal for patriotic service by the members of the Corps.

The Director General further demonstrated his commitment to Corps welfare by procuring prosthetic limbs for a Corps Member in furtherance of his welfare policy. The sum of Thirty-two Million Naira (N32,000,000.00) was expended to procure the limbs for Corps Member, Nuraddeen Tahir from Kano State, who, along with other Corps Members, was involved in a road traffic accident, while on his way to report for Primary Assignment after the 2019 Batch 'B' Stream 1 Orientation Course in Taraba State. The Corps Member, who had earlier lost an arm at a younger age, had the other one amputated as a result of the accident. The artificial limbs have already been supplied, while Nuraddeen was trained on the effective use of the limbs before he was re-united with his family. With this development, he can now effectively perform normal tasks such as writing with the limbs.

The Director General relentlessly pursued the issue of increment of Corps Members' allowance in the wake of approval of the new National Minimum Wage. His effort paid-off and the allowance of Corps Members was increased from Nineteen thousand, Eight hundred Naira (N19,800.00) to Thirty-three Thousand Naira (N33,000.00). Following the commencement of the payment of the new rate with effect from January 2020, the Director General along with the Honourable Minister

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of Youth and Sports Development and some representatives of Corps Members paid a “Thank-you” visit to His Excellency, the President and Commander-in-Chief, Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari GCFR on 6th February, 2020 at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Following improvement in the security situation in the country, the Director General sought for, and got approval from the Federal Government for a return to the earlier suspended ceremonial passing-out of Corps Members. Accordingly, the Passing-Out Ceremony of the 2019 Batch ‘A’ Corps Members was marked with colorful parades nationwide, thereby increasing the visibility of the NYSC.

The successful conduct of Orientation courses is also another achievement of the Director General as he oversaw the successful conduct of the 2019 Batch ‘B’ Streams I and II, as well as 2019 Batch ‘C’ Streams I and II Orientation Courses.

As a proactive measure, NYSC Management suspended the 2020 Batch ‘A’ Stream 1 Orientation Course just a week into the exercise as a deliberate effort to avert the spread of COVID-19 in the Orientation Camps. The commendable action equally brought to the fore his concern for the health and general well-being of Corps Members and staff.

In recognition of his efforts at curtailing the spread of COVID-19, Victims Support Funds (VSF), an organisation chaired by Lt Gen TY Danjuma donated 60,000 RDT test kits to the Scheme. The kits are used for the screening of prospective Corps Members and camp officials for COVID-19 in NYSC Orientation camps nationwide.

In his quest to expand the administrative structure of the Scheme, the Director General ensured the smooth take - off of the NYSC Area Offices, whose approval had earlier been secured by the immediate past administration of Gen Kazaure, one in each of the six geo-political zones of the country, headed by a Director on salary grade level 17. This feat

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has opened up more vacancies, allowing for posting of other cadre of staff alongside the Directors to man the Offices. The Area Offices are located in Kaduna (North West), Niger (North Central), Bauchi (North East), Enugu (South East), Osun (South West) and Delta (South South) have since taken off and have in no mean way boosted staff morale and operations of the Scheme.

In line with one of the cardinal points of his policy thrust, the Director General has been pursuing policies that are geared not only towards motivating staff, but also promoting industrial harmony in the Scheme. This has been aptly demonstrated through prompt payment of entitlements, capacity building programmes, as well as timely and transparent conduct of promotion examinations. During the 2020 Promotion Exercise for instance, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighteen (1,718) out of the Two Thousand One Hundred Fifty-One (2,151) officers that participated in the event were elevated to the next grade level after meeting the requirements stipulated in the Public Service Rules and NYSC Conditions of Service. Additionally, the 2021 Senior Staff Promotion Examination recorded a huge success. The impact of these promotion exercises has reinforced the commitment of staff to work for an enhanced performance.

Meanwhile, as Management strives to enhance the motivation of staff, much premium is laid on the need to have a highly disciplined workforce. In this regard, officers who commit infractions are reprimanded in line with the provisions of the Public Service Rules (PSR).

On strengthening the existing collaboration with critical stakeholders, on assumption of office, the Director General saw the dire need to sustain and strengthen the existing collaboration with critical stakeholders to garner more support and involve them in the management of the Scheme. He therefore embarked on advocacy visits to the stakeholders such as the former Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, whose administration founded the Scheme. The Director-General has had interface with the 36 State Governors, the Governor of

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the Central Bank of Nigeria, heads of Security and Anti-Corruption Agencies, Federal Road Safety Corps, among other stakeholders. The impact of this initiative is the improvement already being achieved in stakeholders' support to the Scheme which is of great essence.

The Director General also addressed a meeting of the Nigeria Governors' Forum – the first of such engagement by any Chief Executive of the Scheme. He used the occasion of the meeting to appreciate the State Governors for their support to the Scheme, through various intervention projects in their respective States. He drew their attention to other areas that needed to be addressed, being part of the obligations of the State Governments to the Corps, as spelt out in the NYSC Act.

Consequently the hosting of the meeting of NYSC top Management with the representatives of State Governments and the Federal Capital Territory Administration, a fallout of the meeting with the Governor's Forum is aimed at strengthening the collaboration with the Scheme, with a particular focus on the discharge of the statutory obligations of the States and FCT to the NYSC, as spelt out in its enabling Act.

The impact of the meeting is profound, as several State Governments have made remarkable gestures in support of the Scheme. Prominent among them is the donation of two NYSC permanent Orientation camps by Edo and Anambra States, plans by the Lagos State Government to build a 14,000 -- capacity Orientation camp and the ongoing upgrading and rehabilitation of camp facilities in twenty five States, while the expansion of camp facilities has commenced in nine States to meet the 5,000 -- Corps Member and 500 -- course official -- capacity camp.

Other notable gains derived from the meeting include, constitution of functional NYSC State Governing Boards in seventeen States, with eighteen States enhancing the regular payment of state allowance to Corps Members, provision and upgrading of transit camps for Corps Members in thirty -- one states, provision of watertight security for Corps Members in all the States and the FCT, issuance of circulars by

Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim:

State Governments against the rejection of Corps Members, increased partnership with the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON), provision of decent accommodation or payment of allowance in lieu of that to Corps Members and provision of office and residential accommodation by the States hosting the Headquarters of the Area Offices.

In Promoting NYSC/Media relations, the Director General has since assumption of duty, strived to strengthen the cordial relations the Scheme enjoys with the Media. This, he kick-started with his maiden chat with Editors, Bureau Chiefs and Youth Correspondents of various Media Organisations in the country on 15th August, 2019. Brig Gen S Ibrahim also paid courtesy visits to Media offices in Abuja, including the Headquarters of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Media Trust Limited and Leadership Group Limited. Similar visits with Director-General's directive were also made to Lagos Head Offices of The Punch, Daily Sun, The Nation newspapers, among others. He has consistently maintained his Media-friendly posture, thereby attracting wider publicity for the Scheme's activities.

To deepen and sustain the wide publicity that the Scheme has enjoyed, he has resuscitated the production and airing of the NYSC Half Hour programme on NTA International Channel 251 and Armed Forces Radio FM. So far, plans have reached an advanced stage to establish the first ever NYSC FM Radio that will be useful to adequately drive the publicity efforts of the Scheme and showcase its activities to Nigerians and the entire world.

The Director-General in furtherance of his transparent, inspirational and all-inclusive style of administration paid visits to some former Chief Executives of the Scheme. The gesture was aimed at appreciating their respective contributions to the development of Scheme when they were in the saddle of leadership, and also tap into their vast wealth of experience. The former Chief Executives appreciated the initiative as it was the first ever visit paid simultaneously to them.

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The maiden meeting with the Registrars of some Foreign Corps Producing Institutions was also held, having, uncovered the fraudulent activities of some tertiary institutions in Africa, especially in the West Africa sub region which have the penchant to issue questionable academic certificates to unqualified persons, who in turn present same to get mobilised for national service. The Director-General has commenced an aggressive fight against this menace which has earned him the commendation of the President, His Excellency Muhammadu Buhari GCFR, during his address at the 2018/2019 President's NYSC Honours Award Ceremony. Similar commendations were given to him by a broad spectrum of vice chancellors of some indigenous and foreign institutions, including the Honourable Minister of Education.

In addition to hosting the meeting with the Registrars, internal mechanisms have been put in place for easier detection of unqualified persons attempting to present themselves for mobilisation for service. As a result of the stance of Management, some of the foreign institutions are now volunteering to alert NYSC of suspected fraudulent practices by their students. Interestingly, out of over twenty thousand (20,000) persons who registered online as foreign-trained prospective Corps Members of the 2019 Batch 'C' Service Year, only three thousand, four hundred and twenty (3,420) turned up for the pre-mobilisation physical screening of their credentials.

To serve as a deterrent to others, sixty-five (65) unqualified persons arrested during the 2019 Batch 'B' Stream II Orientation Course in camps across the country are being prosecuted with some convictions already secured. These steps taken by Management have helped to create national awareness, especially on the need for parents and guardians to check the accreditation status of the institutions attended by their wards, and also monitor their academic progress.

The bold move by the Director General in sanitising the mobilisation process will also ensure that only well trained and competent persons occupy critical positions that will fast-track the development of the country.

Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim:

The Director-General has equally hosted a national sensitisation programme on the NYSC Act on 24th July, 2019 in Abuja. Prior to this, it was clear that many Nigerians were not aware of the provisions of the Act – a situation that has led to avoidable infractions. With the sensitisation, which is still on-going, organisations and individuals are now having better understanding of their obligations to the Scheme. In particular, cases of evasion and abscondment from Service, especially by the foreign-trained Nigerian graduates, are expected to reduce drastically.

Broadly looking at the reinvigoration of the NYSC ventures and skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development programme in line with NYSC Act for greater impact, the Director General has been speaking passionately about his desire to make the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) Programme and NYSC Ventures Management Departments more functional.

To match words with actions, he has taken several steps towards reinvigorating the SAED programme, including, but not limited to the following:

- Renewal of commitment by the NYSC and Bank of Industry towards the resuscitation of empowerment of Corps entrepreneurs with business loans under the BOI-NYSC Graduate Empowerment Fund.
- Intensive monitoring of GEF beneficiaries.
- New collaboration with NIRSALE Microfinance Bank on empowerment of Corps entrepreneurs.
- New partnership with Unity Bank Plc on a programme named 'Allawee' aimed at empowering Corps members.
- Collaboration with British-American Tobacco Foundation on empowerment of Corps Members with agricultural skills and business trainings, farm internship, mentoring and farm input supplies.
- Hosting of the 2020 NYSC SAED Stakeholders meeting aimed at reviewing the programme implementation strategies, as well as

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strengthening of existing partnerships and exploring new ones for further technical and material support.

- Pursuing the completion of the North West Skill Acquisition Centre in Kazaure, Jigawa State, this is now at advanced stage.
- Commencement of work on the North Central Skill Acquisition Centre in Keffi, Nasarawa State.
- Research-based collaboration with OAU-NACETEM sponsored by a Canadian Agency, International Development Research Centre on evaluation of the impact of SAED and reinvigorating it for greater impact.
- Resuscitation of NYSC Water Factory and Bakery at NYSC Orientation Camp Kubwa. The NYSC Water Factory and Bakery were revived and revitalised by the Director-General immediately he assumed office, and these two ventures are now producing at full capacity. The water and bread produced in these ventures are being supplied to the FCT, Nasarawa, Kogi, Kaduna and Niger State Orientation camps and the general public. These ventures now generate revenue to the Scheme and help Corps Members acquire skills too.
- Purchase of modern farm equipment for the four NYSC functional farms namely, NYSC Farm Kwali in FCT, Saminaka, Kebbi State, Dungulbi, Bauchi State and Iseyin Oyo State. Each of these farms now has tractors and other basic farm equipment.
- The consistent support in terms of funding and staffing has increased the hectares under cultivation from 60 hectares to 160 hectares during the 2020 farming season.
- Reclaiming of NYSC farmland at Ezillo which hitherto was collected by the Ebonyi State Government. Immediately after the reclaiming, tractor was purchased for farming operations at the Ezillo Farm.
- The structure of Ventures Management Department was expanded which gave room for the promotion of staff, and has in no mean way motivated the staff members.

Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim:

- Registration of the two NYSC Garment Factories, Water Factory and Bakery with the Corporate Affairs Commission. Arising from the last Meeting of the NYSC Top Management with Representatives of State Governments, the Governors of Edo and Ekiti States announced the donation of land for the sitting of two garment factories which will boost the production of Corps Members' kit items.
- Developing partnership with relevant institutions such as International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA), NCRI, NCAM, ARMTI, NCAC etc. to enhance the productivity of NYSC Farms/Ventures among others.
- Resuscitation of moribund NYSC Feedmill, Lagos. The mill is now ready to start production of animal feeds.
- Construction of new poultry pen at NYSC farm Kwali, FCT.
- The Director General has met with the State Governors and other stakeholders with a view to securing land in all the States for agricultural production.

In addition to the above, twelve States have opened up their skills centres for the post camp training of Corps Members to further strengthen the skills and entrepreneurship training acquired in camp.

- The tremendous support given by the Director General has repositioned all the NYSC Ventures for greater revenue generation for the Scheme.

Interestingly, the Scheme paid into the national coffers over Two Hundred and Eighty Million Naira (N280,000,000.00) as internally generated revenue which is unprecedented in the annals of the Scheme.

The Director General who has introduced the use of name tags by every member of staff for easy identification, equally in an unprecedented move sought the help of the Federal Government in tackling the ecological challenges confronting some of the NYSC Orientation camps. Government granted the request through the deployment of Ecological

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Fund to tackle the menace. Eight camps have been approved as beneficiaries in the first phase of the intervention. Already, work is ongoing in Cross River, Taraba, FCT and Nasarawa Orientation camps.

In recognition of his service to the nation, Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim who has institutionalised Farewell Parade for outgoing NYSC Chief Executives - a novelty, has received numerous commendations and awards which include:

- Chief of Army Staff Award as the Overall Best Participant for 2013 NAECC Executive Management Course.
- Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) Special Recognition Award 2014.
- Award for Distinguished Professional Contributions to Public Service/Fellowship (FCAI) by Institute of Corporate Administration.
- Professional National Award (Historical Society of Nigeria HSN) and
- Chief of Army Staff Commendation Letter 2018.

Conclusion

The above discourse has given an insight on the achievements of General Shuaibu Ibrahim since becoming the Director General of the National Youth Service Corps. Within the last two years, the Scheme has made some giant strides owing to the pursuit of strict implementation of the Director General's five-point policy thrust. Therefore, the contributions of Brig Gen Ibrahim to the NYSC since his ascension into office cannot be overemphasised. These contributions are indeed remarkable, and will undoubtedly stand the test of time, having set the Scheme on growth trajectory and continuous relevance.

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Jibril Umar, Head of Ventures Kubwa, 50+, Interviewed at Kubwa Abuja, 15/3/21

Emeka -- Rems Mgbemena, Deputy Director and Head, Publications Division, Press and Public Relations Unit, NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 50+, Interviewed at Abuja, 15/3/21

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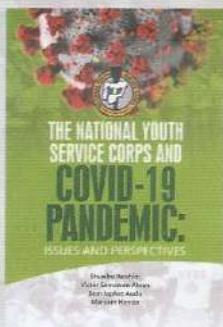
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ABOUT THE BOOK

The coronavirus (COVID 19) pandemic ripped through the world with profound impact on every sector of the global economy. The health challenges were unprecedented, thus demanding institutional and behavioural changes that posed severe logistical problems for nations, organisations, and individuals. Precautionary measures led to certain protocols being observed, such as; relentless testing, social distancing, and wearing of face masks amongst others. These challenges led to various governments and organisations responses through different measures. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) initiated a robust response to the COVID 19 pandemic that highlighted strong leadership, efficiency, health awareness, and pro-activeness. The book, *The National Youth Service Corps and COVID 19 Pandemic: Issues and Perspectives* is a collection of well researched articles that highlights the issues and the responses of the NYSC to the COVID 19 pandemic. It documents the strategic response, resilience, humanitarian actions, and patriotism of the NYSC and the Nigerian youths.



ABOUT THE EDITORS

Shuaibu Ibrahim is an Associate Professor of Military History and a serving Brigadier General in the Nigerian Army. He was formerly Head, Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy; former Registrar, Nigerian Army University, Biu, Borno State and currently the Director General, National Youth Service Corps, Yakubu Gowon House, Abuja.

Victor Semawon Akran is an Associate Professor of History and Head, Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Bem Japhet Audu PhD is the Head, Centre for the Study of Leadership and Complex Military Operations, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna. He lectures in the Department of History and War Studies, NDA.

Dr. Maryam Hamza is a lecturer in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna. She is also a Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Leadership and Complex Military Operations, NDA.



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