

An Impact Assessment of Covid-19 Pandemic on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals one and two in Nigeria

¹Ephraim Ifediri Nwokporo, ¹Emmanual Chukwuebuka Orakwe, ²Okechukwu Bonaventure Anozie, Benedict Onyeso

¹Department of Sociology, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

²Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Abstract: *The COVID-19 global crisis has triggered the undoing of recorded progress of the SDGs. This study is an impact assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic on goals one and two of the SDGs in Nigeria. Although the SDGs were not on track in achieving its goals and targets by year 2030, the pandemic has stalled sustainable development plans and triggered loss of developmental gains in Nigeria. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, secondary data sources was used for the study. This involved a detailed review of COVID-19 related assessments in context of the SDG one and two in Nigeria. The results showed that the Coronavirus pandemic has unleashed global socio-economic and health crisis, with consequences, particularly –heightened rate of poverty, inequality, malnutrition, hunger, food insecurity and death in Nigeria. It was concluded that in Nigeria, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals one and two. Therefore, the study recommends the urgent safeguarding of developmental gains through the institution of SDGs sensitive COVID-19 recovery programmes, timely mass vaccination and humanitarian intervention, improved emergency preparedness and strengthened health care system. The policy implication is that innovative international and national communication and partnerships, as well as financial supports are more than ever needed in developing a transformative route to a more inclusive, equal and sustainable post COVID-19 Nigeria.*

Keywords: *COVID-19, Pandemic, Poverty, Sustainable Development Goals.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since early 2020, the world has been on her knees, grappling with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Although pandemics are age-old phenomenon, the crisis and emergency preparedness of the world has been challenged, in spite of the heightened 21st century scientific and technological advancements. The pandemic which began as a health emergency in Wuhan, China in late 2019 has swiftly become the worst human and economic crisis of the third millennium. The world as at February 8 2021, recorded more than 105 million confirmed cases, this is including more than 2 million COVID-19 deaths (World Health Organisation, 2021). Nigeria on the other hand, had at this period, recorded 140,391 confirmed cases, with 1,673 COVID-19 deaths (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2021).

Recognising that the impact of the pandemic and levels of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals may be uneven in countries of the world, the COVID-19 outbreak has either stalled, or reversed the milestones achieved by most countries towards the 2030 Agenda (UN Economic and Social

Council, 2020).The pandemic reaffirms the worlds shared susceptibility and interconnectedness to global emergencies and challenges. This brings to consciousness that we are only as strong as our weakest link in facing emergencies such as the COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, in our resolve and actions for a socially inclusive, environmentally resilient and economically sustainable development, we must endeavour to leave no one behind (OECD, 2020).

II. THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) refers to the time-bound 17 universal-integrated goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators of progress, aimed at creating a socially inclusive, economically sustainable and environmentally resilient world, where no one would be left behind both in the present and in the future generation. While recognizing different realities including levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities, the agenda “Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development” was adopted on the 25th day of September 2015, at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and are believed to guide the world’s decision for the next 15 years (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs serves as linchpin, securing the welfare of the people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. The new developmental agenda is also believed to leverage on the legacies, achievements and experiences of the MDGs in attaining the new set goals and targets.

The first goal of the SDGs, “end poverty in all its forms everywhere”, is targeted at eradicating extreme poverty (people living on less than \$1.90 a day); reducing poverty by half; implementing social protection systems; attaining equal rights to ownership, basic services, technology and economic resources; building resilience to environmental, economic and social disasters; as well as mobilizing resources to implement policies aimed at ending poverty; creating pro-poor and gender-sensitive policy frameworks (OSSAP-SDGs, 2016).Recognizing that hunger is the leading cause of death, the second goal of the SDGs, “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”, is focused on attaining universal access to safe and nutritious food; putting to stop all forms of malnutrition; increasing the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers; ensuring sustainable food production and resilient agricultural practices; maintaining the genetic diversity in food production; investing in rural infrastructure, agricultural research, technology and gene banks; preventing agricultural trade restrictions, market distortions and export subsidies; as well as ensuring stable food commodity markets and timely access to information (OSSAP-SDGs, 2016).

Nigeria, like other Member States of the United Nations, was one of the countries in the global South to adopt the Agenda 2030. Foremost to the country’s implementation of the SDGs was the indicators baseline study, conducted by the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs (OSSAP-SDGs). The study showed that 62.6% of the Nigerian population lived below the national and international poverty line, 25.5% undernourishment, prevalence of food insecurity: 26.4% moderate and 19.6% severe food insecurity; 37.4% stunting among under 5 children; as well as 16.4% prevalence of malnutrition among under 5 children in Nigeria (OSSAP-SDGs, 2016).

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the SDGs had attained some recorded progress. These progresses although uneven in countries of the world, were still not on track in meeting the 2030 goals for sustainable development, especially in the aspects of goals one and two (United Nations, 2020).The spending needs required in achieving the SDGs by 2030 were proven not to have received a corresponding financing (UN SG, 2019); this situation has been worsened by the huge financial burden induced by the pandemic. According to Gaspar, et al. (2019), Nigeria and other low-income and emerging economies, in filling their SDG spending gaps would require, on an average, a spending of additional 15.4 and 4 percentage points of their gross domestic product (GDP) respectively.

The pandemic and its attendant effects have pushed tens of millions of people back into extreme poverty, increased the levels of food insecurity and hunger, gradually erasing the unassuming milestones made in recent past. The 2020 SDGs report foresees some 71 million persons aggressively returned into extreme poverty, this since 1998 may for the first time, result into a rise in global poverty (United Nations, 2020). In developing countries like Nigeria, 40% – 85% of small-scale food producers have been hit hard by the pandemic. Despite the SDGs showing resilience, the novel corona outbreak has dazed the very foundation of the Agenda 2030, for sustainable development.

Since 2010, the world has recorded a steady deceleration of global poverty from 15.7%, 10.0% and 8.2% in 2010, 2015 and 2019 respectively. Yet, baseline projections put 6% of the world population in year 2030 to still live in extreme poverty (United Nations, 2020). These by imply the non-attainability of goal one of the SDGs. With the COVID-19 pandemic, sub-Saharan Africa has been projected to record one of the largest increases in extreme poverty with some 26 million persons living below the international poverty line (United Nations, 2020). Presently, the pandemic has reversed the global trend in poverty reduction and all projections points to the world returning to its 2017 level in global extreme poverty rate (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2020b). In 2020, only eighty seven countries had in its national legislation, unemployment protection programmes. In sub-Saharan Africa, barely three percent of the unemployed are beneficiaries of unemployment protection programmes (United Nations, 2020).

The last six years has seen an unchanged and almost consecutive years of increased number of persons going hungry (United Nations, 2020). Before the pandemic, in 2019, about 750 million of the global population lived in severe food insecurity, unable to feed and in worst scenarios go days without having to eat anything. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 outbreak has inflicted unimaginable hardship and starvation where additional 132 million of the global population experienced undernourishment (United Nations, 2020). The lockdown and other COVID-19 control measures have seen to the closure of markets and businesses resulting into hiatus in local and international supply chains. Small scale food producers in most African countries have incurred record year's losses in their inability to timely get their products to their targeted markets. Undernutrition and stunting, a common cause of death and poor cognitive development in sub-Saharan Africa, with about 36% prevalence among under 5 children, has in 2019, affected 6.9% (forty-seven million) children globally (United Nations, 2020). This goes far, to show the long walk needed, in meeting the 5% target of 2025 and 3% universal target in 2030. In the context of the pandemic, the risks are high and the odds against the healthy growth and general development of children, most especially, those facing lack of access to nutritious and essential diets.

III. NIGERIA: THE SDG ONE AND TWO IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Nigeria, the sixth most populated country in the globe, the largest in Africa and a leading oil producing country in the world, recorded her first Coronavirus Disease 2019 case in late February 2020 (Congressional Research Service Report, 2020). Sequel to the disease outbreak which subsequently turned into a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), the country as containment measures deployed lockdowns, curfew, social/physical distancing, self-isolation and quarantine measures in curbing the spread of the disease. These measures however, are not without its attendant socio-economic challenges most especially on an economy already facing two serious economic contractions in space of 5 years. Recall that the country's annual growth fell as low as -1.6% in 2016, just when concerted efforts were yielding fruits, with the annual gross domestic product growth at 2.2% in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the country into another recession, with an estimated -3.2% fall in real GDP Growth in 2020 (World Bank Group, 2020).

The World Bank Group (2020) projected that the Nigeria poverty rate in 2020 is likely to increase to 40.2, from 40.1 in 2019, (accounting for additional 2.3 million increase of people in poverty). Nonetheless, with the present recession (largely caused by the pandemic), a projected 42.5% increase in the rate of poverty is

perhaps anticipated in Nigeria. These among other factors are projected to push more 4.9 million Nigerian population into poverty in 2020 (World Bank Group, 2020).

The country in the past eleven years has been, up-till today, battling with the Boko-Haram insurgency. This insurgency even in the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic has internally displaced more than two million Nigerians from the six northeastern states; additional five hundred and forty thousand people from north-central and northwest states have also been displaced by banditry, kidnappings and communal clashes (World Food Programme and International Organization for Migration, 2020). These crisis has in recent past turned breast sucking infants and children into orphans, repositioned young mothers to widows, separated others from their families and loved ones, blocked economic activities and channels of aid of more than 800, 000 Nigerians, as well as pushing many into extreme hunger and poverty (Food Security Information Network, 2020). Therefore, in the narrative of what is happening to poverty and hunger (SDGs one and two) in context of the pandemic in Nigeria, this insurgency among other factors remains necessary dynamics for consideration.

The World Data Lab (2020) puts Nigeria as the country with largest share of people living in extreme poverty (see the *World Poverty Clock*). Moreso, the World Bank at the wake of the pandemic posits that half of the Nigerian population lived on less than \$1.90 per day (World Bank, 2020). Yet to be said, is the situation in the northeastern region. According to the UNHCR, in mid-2020, about 2.1 million persons in Nigeria (most especially in the northeast) were displaced, with more three hundred thousand as refugees in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The Northeast Nigeria however, is at emergency level food insecurity and famine (UNHCR, 2020; USAID, 2020).

Before the pandemic, seven percent of children under the age of five in Nigeria faced acute malnutrition, out of which, about 1.5% suffered severe acute malnutrition. Only 34.5% of 6 – 23 months children in Nigeria meet the dietary diversity requirement (Food Security Information Network, 2020). The 2019 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey puts thirty seven percent under 5 Nigerian children to be stunted with vast number of them from the northern Nigeria (Nigeria National Population Commission, 2019). Early 2020, the wake of the pandemic, from the base of 7.7 million, the population of Nigerians (especially in the northeast) in dire need of assistance skyrocketed to 10.6 million after the disease outbreak (Global Humanitarian Overview, 2020). Statistics from June – August 2020, shows that eight hundred and seven million Nigerians faced acute food insecurity. When compared with the 2019 statistics of June – August, only five million people faced acute food insecurity. Thus, the pandemic has negatively impacted the Sustainable Development Goal two. Instead of progressive development, the pandemic has revised the success of the Global goal 2 in Nigeria (CadreHarmonisé, 2020; Food Security Information Network, 2020).

IV. CONCLUSION

From the fore-going, it can be deduced that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals one and two. This study therefore recommends the urgent safeguarding of developmental gains through the institution of SDGs sensitive COVID-19 recovery programmes, timely mass vaccination and humanitarian intervention, improved emergency preparedness and strengthened healthcare system. The policy implication is that innovative international and national communication and partnerships, as well as financial supports are more than ever needed in developing a transformative route to a more inclusive, equal and sustainable post COVID-19 Nigeria.

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