

Covid-19 and the Dialectics of Global Pandemics in Africa

Challenges, Opportunities & the Future of the Global Economy in the Face of COVID-19



EDITED BY

*Munyaradzi Mawere, Bernard Chazovachii
& Francis Machingura*

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Chapter 3

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown on Nigeria's Economy and Socio-cultural Life: A study of Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

Theresa Nfam Odeigah

Abstract

When the first cases of the novel Covid-19 disease were reported, few people foresaw how the disease would upend culture, social life and work environments across the entire Niger Delta region and the world at large. It soon emerged that Covid-19 is more than an unprecedented health crisis, which has disrupted education, the economy, food systems, and shattered livelihoods while exposing and exacerbating systemic inequities in many of our communities in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria as a whole. Even the health systems of highly developed countries could not cope with the Covid-19 pandemic. In the past, Nigeria and the Niger Delta region have experienced epidemics of Lassa fever, Monkey Pox Disease, Cholera, Yellow Fever, Ebola, Cerebrospinal Meningitis and Measles, among others, but so far Covid-19 pandemic has had the greatest effect on the economic, social, cultural, psychological, religious activities and educational system. The lockdown measures imposed to control the spread of Covid-19 have so far led the nation and the Niger Delta into economic recession, high level of inflation, massive job losses, shutting down of markets, financial institutions, educational institutions, the transportation system, the tourism industry as well as worship centres. The social, cultural and economic aftershocks will be with the people of the region for years to come. Covid-19 vaccine and treatment trials are being carried out to try and contain the pandemic. This paper is an attempt to examining the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. A historic-structural and multi-disciplinary approaches are used for this study. The chapter concludes that the consequences of the Covid-19 lockdown were unambiguously negative to the people of the Niger Delta region.

Keywords: Impact, Covid-19 Pandemic, Economy, Lockdown

Introduction

When the first cases of the novel Covid-19 disease were reported, few people foresaw how the disease would upend culture, social life and work environments across the entire Niger Delta region, the Nigerian government and the world at large. It soon emerged that Covid-19 is more than an unprecedented health crisis, which has disrupted education, the economy, the health sector, food systems, and shattered livelihoods while exposing and exacerbating systemic inequities in many of our communities in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria as a whole (Chukwuka and Mma, 2020). Even the health systems of the so-called highly developed countries could not cope with the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the past, Nigeria and the Niger Delta region have experienced epidemics of Lassa fever, Monkey Pox Disease, Cholera, Yellow Fever, Ebola, Cerebrospinal Meningitis and Measles, among other diseases, but so far the Covid-19 pandemic has had the greatest effect on the economic, social, cultural, psychological life, religious activities and the educational system of the Niger Delta region (Eromosele, 2020). Worse still, the lockdown measures imposed to control the spread of Covid-19 have led the nation and the Niger Delta region into economic recession, high level of inflation, massive job losses, shutting down of the markets, financial institutions, educational institutions, the transportation system, the tourism industry as well as worship centres. There is no doubt that the social, cultural and economic aftershocks will be with the people of the region for years to come. Covid-19 vaccine and treatment trials are being carried out to try and contain the pandemic. This chapter is an attempt to examining the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. A historic-structural and multi-disciplinary approaches were used to gather data for this study. The chapter concludes that the consequences of the Covid-19 lockdown were unambiguously negative to the people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Owen, 2020).

The Spread of COVID-19 and the Lockdown Measures in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

Over the years, there had been some disease outbreaks that negatively affected the economy and the society at large. Historically, all over the world, epidemics have in one way or the other wiped out

millions of human beings, leaving the economy devastated, but it cannot be compared with the present Covid-19 pandemic. It was recorded that over 500 years ago in China, an epidemic broke out living many dead and several bodies were buried in mass graves and till today the site is called *Hamin Mangba* and this site has now been used as a preserved pre-historical site in China¹. There have been other pandemics in the world such as the Plague of Athens, the Antonine plague, the plague of Cyprian, the Spanish flu, the American plague, epidemics of Yellow fever, Lassa, Ebola and the present Covid-19 pandemic, among others (Owen, 2020).

In 2019, an outbreak of Corona Virus Disease began in Wuhan in China and quickly spread to other parts of the world. About two hundred and thirteen countries of the World including Nigeria have been affected with Covid-19 (www.worldometers.info). On 20th February, 2020 an Italian who was working in Ogun State, South West Nigeria travelled from Italy back to Lagos and tested positive to the Covid-19 on arrival. Subsequently, there was a second case of a Nigerian man that also tested positive in same Ogun State, and following this development the government set up a Covid-19 taskforce in preparedness to tackle the pandemic and also declared a lockdown in Abuja Nigeria's Federal Capital, Lagos the commercial capital and Ogun State to avoid the spread of the disease to other parts of the country².

In trying to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, the governors of the states in the Niger Delta region also imposed a lockdown in their various states that eventually disrupted economic, social and political activities. This decision of imposing an early lockdown in the states of the Niger Delta and other parts of the country paralysed the economy and brought hardship to the citizens. The States in the Niger Delta region affected with the Covid-19 pandemic were Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo and Ondo with the initial exception of Cross-River State because the Governor of the State was initially in denial and erroneously claimed that the state was Covid-19 free. The restriction of movement that accompanied the lockdown put almost every economic activity on hold in the different states of the Niger Delta region (Benson, 2020).

¹ <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.livescience>

² <https://ncdc.gov.ng/news>first-ca>, 2020

The Nigerian medical system with its structural and infrastructural weaknesses was further weakened and overwhelmed as a result of the many Covid-19 cases that were being diagnosed. With only four functional molecular laboratories that had the polymerase chain reaction facility at the out-break of the pandemic to properly diagnose Covid-19 in the country, there was a dire need to scale up testing and within three months the number of laboratories increased to forty-four³.

Nigeria and the Niger Delta by extension imposed a lockdown when it had few cases of Covid-19, then eased it as the cases accelerated and more importantly the country did not use this period of lockdown wisely because testing was not accelerated and even the contact tracing of suspected cases was not far-reaching. By March 2020, about 74 countries in the world imposed some form of lockdown, even though Nigeria had only 97 cases and one recorded death, but on March 29th 2020, a lockdown was imposed in Nigeria. On April 13th 2020, the Nigerian lockdown was extended, but by May 2nd 2020, lockdown measures were suddenly eased because of the harsh economic and social consequences the lockdown was having on the ordinary people and government had not made adequate preparation to mitigate these problems. This gave the impression that Nigeria's decision to impose a lockdown was not so much a response to the science as part of a specially crafted strategy than jumping on the band wagon. With the increasing cases, on May 2nd, 2020, the president still announced the easing of lockdown measures (Agbor, 2020).

This sudden change of policy was not linked to any particular milestone in Nigeria's efforts to contain the virus. Rather, it seemed to be a response to the heavy economic and social cost of imposing the lockdown in the first place. While the goal of the lockdown in most Western countries has been to "flatten the curve" of Covid-19 infection, Nigeria's lockdown could have been part of a strategy to buy time in other ways (Okon, 2020). The lockdown was also not accompanied by ramping up of Covid-19 testing, building more isolation centres, putting effective contact tracing systems in place, training of health care workers, equipping more hospitals and ensuring widespread support for citizens to abide by the restrictions of lockdown. Nigeria's Covid-19 lockdown therefore, was not geared

³ <https://www.ncdc.gov.ng/news/update-oncovid-19-innigeria>

at “flattening the curve”; rather it seemed that the easing of the lockdown was a response to the heavy economic, social and political cost of imposing it (Ukpe, 2020).

However, in the Niger Delta Region, cases of Covid-19 kept increasing on a daily basis. Earlier, health experts had warned that there would be an increase in the number of infections and that the region was still months away from the peak of the pandemic and that the rapid spread of the virus would possibly worsen among communities through community transmission. Most importantly, individuals found it difficult to stay indoors and avoid contact with other people in a way to limit the spread of Covid-19 pandemic (Own, 2020). The table 1 below highlights the cases of Covid-19 in the different states of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria from 23rd March, 2020 when the first case was reported in Edo state to 25th of July 2020. The table also shows the total number of confirmed cases, total number of patients on admission, total number of discharged cases and the total number of deaths due to Covid-19 in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

The Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on the Niger Delta People Economic Activities

The impact of the covid-19 pandemic has plunged the Niger Delta economy into recession. With the lockdown, social distancing of people, isolation and quarantine approach to the pandemic, the Niger Delta economy gradually went into recession, because most of the important economic players and enterprises were short down resulting to massive loss of income, and subsequent unemployment. Some families could not feed their children, because they were not prepared for the lockdown and government did not make enough provisions for its citizens (Ozili, 2020). The strict measures used to enforce the lockdown led to the slowing down of the economy and the economic recession that ensued.

Trade also suffered a major setback during this pandemic period and the lockdown constrained traders from moving from their homes to the marketplace. The Niger Delta region that was hitherto witnessing a large volume of trading activities suddenly became a non-vibrant zone during the lockdown. One of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown was the fall in oil price across the world and this drop in oil price was one of the lowest ever in recent times (Ademola, 2020). This really affected the [national] budget of

Nigeria which had always depended on oil and gas revenue for its sustenance. The Niger Delta states as well as the Federal Government of Nigeria had to pass supplementary budgets as a way of adjusting to the Covid-19 pandemic (Ukoha, 2020). The economic uncertainties in the Niger Delta region significantly led to an increase in food price and consumption because people were lockdown at home. It is important to note that the restriction of movement of individuals and inter- state border's closure led to a drastic decline in both food supply and proper distribution of goods to other states.

Confirmed Cases of Covid-19 in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

State Affected	No. of cases Confirmed	No of Cases on Admission	No of Cases Discharged	No of Deaths
Akwa-Ibom	208	80	121	7
Bayelsa	326	79	226	21
Cross Rive	34	30	3	1
Delta	1,456	782	634	40
Edo	2,128	696	1,360	72
Rivers	1,600	469	1,081	50
Ondo State	1030	760	284	23
Total	6,491	2,848	3,440	209

Table 1: Source: Covid-19 ncdc.gov.ng. Accessed 24th July, 2020.

The fundamental changes in the oil and gas sector of the economy with the reduced demand for oil led to the crash of oil price in the international market pushing the economy in to a recession. Availability of food to the people during the period of the lockdown became a major problem because the markets and the various other outlets such as the super-markets and eatery were closed down and people were unable to purchase food items (Ogunyemi, 2020). Economic access became difficult for the people because the cost of food items became expensive and some people's businesses went down and life became unbearable. During the period of the lockdown, the Fulani herdsmen seized the opportunity by conveying their cattle to various farmlands for grazing and this also resulted to some food security problems in the area because several farmlands were destroyed and crops eaten by the cattle. All these factors

affected trade and commerce in the Niger Delta region during the lockdown.

This pandemic also affected food prices, such as the price of tomatoes, yams and *garri* among others because 1kg of tomatoes for instance increased by 6.25 percent and this rapid rise in food index was caused by the lockdown. The economic impact of the lockdown became more apparent as the lockdown was prolonged (Ademola, 2020). In the light of the predication and warning by the World Health Organisation (WHO), that Africa was going to be the epicentre of the second wave of the pandemic, there was palpable fear by the governors of the states of the Niger Delta region and the African continent as a whole. This resulted in policies such as the granting of soft loans to micro-small and medium business enterprises in the Niger Delta region as the lockdown was eased (Ohia, Bakarey, Ahmad, 2020).

Social Distancing

Social distancing was one of the unprecedented lifestyle and cultural change that came along with the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of the infectious nature of the disease, social distancing measures had to be adapted to curb the spread. There was also restriction of social visits to friends and relations and particularly the elderly who are more prone to Covid-19 infection. Even in small gatherings such as funerals the number of people was limited to about twenty in keeping with the Covid-19 guidelines of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. Social distancing also resulted in people being disallowed to attend social gatherings as a way to limit the spread of the pandemic.

Regular Hand Washing Practice

Apart from physical and social distancing, people had to wash their hands with soap and water regularly to reduce disease transmission. People had to wash hands before entering the house if they went outside their compound. The need to wash hands regularly was enforced as much as possible through the different news media. Where there was no water available as is commonplace in developing countries, people were required to use hand sanitizers to sanitize their hands regularly. People were not required to shake hands and have close body contacts with others. This was very alien to the people

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who culturally would greet one another by the shaking of hands or touching one another as a sign of closeness and unity (Agbor, 2020). For a people who hitherto would not wash their hands after cleaning up a child who passed stool, because it was believed that the stool of infants was not infectious, this new lifestyle was a very strange one to adjust to in the region.

Ceremonies

The suddenly imposed practice of social and physical distancing occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic has been a major challenge for people in the society, especially for people who could be said to be very ceremonial and ritualistic in nature. Burial ceremonies had to be carried out with not more than twenty persons in attendance. Some burial ceremonies had less than twenty persons in attendance and the whole process was brief and receptions for entertainment were not held. There were no opportunity for the bereaved to mourn as was the norm with the people, no opportunity to wear special dresses by the family members and friends of the bereaved. Weddings that had already been fixed before the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown had to go on with very few family members in attendance and the couples went home straight from the church without a reception and the usual entertainment of guests. Traditional marriages were held with mini-receptions at home. This could have been unthinkable for a very cultural, flamboyant and supportive people. The Covid-19 pandemic can be said to have removed one of our strongest and cherished cultural values of identifying with people and being very supportive to one another especially in times of need or when friends or relatives have cause to celebrate (Adepoju, 2020).

Domestic Violence

The lockdown in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as a measure of controlling the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in families being brought together and spending more time together than they have ever done in the recent past. Some families used the opportunity to hold family meetings that they had not held in a long while. This has helped in improving bonding within the family; on the other hand, the lockdown has also witnessed an upsurge in domestic violence in families as a result of family members being made to stay at home for several weeks. Domestic violence between couples and between

parents and children as well as among siblings witnessed an upsurge during the lockdown (Igonikon, 2020).

This family violence manifested in various forms during the lockdown following the Covid-19 pandemic among different ethnic groups and religious groups as well. Family violence manifested emotionally in the families through verbal abuses, shouts, putting people down by family members being ridiculed openly. The physical manifestation of family violence is often the most visible to the ordinary people and included acts of slapping family members, shoving or physical beating of partners or children. The family violence also manifested in economic terms in the form of stoppage of upkeep allowances or money usually given to the wives or the offsprings, resulting in a lot of tension in the family (Benson, 2020).

Family violence during the Covid-19 lockdown also manifested sexually, especially through forced sex or outright denial of conjugal rights by couples. The very nature of the Covid-19 lockdown is a major challenge in managing family violence because the victims could not easily get help as a result of curfew and movement restrictions. In the Niger Delta region, some young girls and minors experienced rape that resulted to death in some of the instances. The problem of sexual abuse in Nigeria cannot be over emphasised. During the lockdown there was an increase in sexual abuse and it became a common phenomenon in Nigeria and this was associated with the effects of the lockdown, poverty, ignorance, illiteracy and being idle among others (David, 2020).

Health

The lockdown in the Niger Delta region which was one of the approaches adopted by the State governments in the region in contending the Covid-19 pandemic had some mental health implications as well for the people. There was a general feeling of apprehension and fear by the people. The information from the various news media platforms that the Covid-19 was one of the most contagious and deadly diseases, generated fear and anxiety, resulting in poor sleep and emotional tension for some of the people in the Niger Delta region. The public health messages and instructions by the various media were very professionally carried out, but probably because Covid-19 is a novel disease, fear, agitation and anxiety experienced by the people were heightened by some of the preventive measures announced and adopted by government and the

Civil Society Organisations as well as the effects of the movement and other restrictions occasioned by the lockdown on the psyche of the people. The Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Covid-19 containment encouraged Nigerians to be vigilant and that care should be exhibited irrespective of our status in the society (www.ncdc.gov.ng).

The response to the covid-19 pandemic containment in the Niger Delta, suffered some setback as a result of the denial of the occurrence of cases of Covid-19 in Cross River State by the Governor of the State. Cross River State is one of the six states in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This approach of the state government eventually resulted to a state-wide industrial action that started on the 5th of July 2020 by the medical doctors in the state because over five of their members had tested positive to Covid-19. This resulted in the management of the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, informing its staff of the five samples from the hospital that were collected which returned positive of Covid-19 using the polymerase chain reaction Technique at the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) accredited laboratory located in a neighbouring state at Alex Ekwueme University Teaching Hospital, Abakiliki, Ebonyi State (Igonikon, 2020).

Educational System

The educational institutions, both government and privately owned universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Secondary and Primary Schools in the Niger Delta region had to be closed down as a result of the lockdown occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. This abrupt and sudden closure of the educational institutions in the Niger Delta region has brought to the fore the huge gap in electronic e-learning and e-education in the region and Nigeria as a whole. The tertiary institutions have not been able to engage their students who have been at home during the lockdown (Chukwu, 2020). The secondary and primary schools, however, had been involved in some form of e-learning through regular lectures on state television. Internet access by the students also improved as the students accessed online lectures and materials using their cell phones or tablets. These helped in keeping the students engaged and active with their studies during the lockdown period.

Apart from the health hazards and other serious consequences of the pandemic, there were also other effects as stated below. Covid-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on teachers and other

workers as a result of job losses. Some teachers were laid off from their various schools because of the shortfall in salaries. The emotional trajectory of laid off teachers and other workers eventually caused psychological problems for the individuals and their families and dependants (Chukwu, 2020). It is hoped that these gaps in the educational system brought to the fore by the Covid-19 lockdown will be addressed by the government and the private proprietors soonest so that teaching and learning is enhanced in all the educational institutions in the region.

Hunger

The hinterland areas of the Niger Delta are known for food production and agriculture and this has sustained the people over the years. The Covid-19 lockdown brought about untold suffering to the people to an extent that a 50kg bag of *garri* which was earlier sold for about \$46naira sold for \$64 naira while a bunch of plantain that was usually sold at the cost of about \$1.1 naira for four fingers became \$2.1 naira and this affected all agricultural produce making it difficult for the people in the area to feed well (Isionu, 2020: 57-58). The days of the lockdown made it practically impossible for farmers to go to their farms and this gave the Fulani herders an opportunity to take their cattle for grazing in most of these farms. Shortage of food in the region caused the farmers to harvest some of their crops prematurely. These crops when taken to the markets recorded unprecedented high profit for the few farmers involved in this practice. The Corona virus pandemic has further caused food crisis in the Niger Delta and this will lead to "*hunger virus*" if not quickly addressed (Benson, 2020).

Election and the Electoral System

One of the major changes that the Covid-19 pandemic brought about in the political life of the people of the Niger Delta region is a new electoral process in the country. The electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria already responded to the pandemic by rolling out guidelines for future elections in the region and the country as well. Among the changes in the new guidelines included the need for social distancing by voters, disinfection of card readers anytime a voter was cleared to vote following the biometric verification and the wearing of face

masks by voters. All these measures were compulsory for the voters in all the polling units and collation centres. The electoral officers would also be donning appropriate personal protective equipment during the elections to protect them from contracting Covid-19 infection. The Independence National Electoral Commission of Nigeria had also shortened the number of hours allocated for elections by two hours to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19.

The Covid-19 virus pandemic, to some extent, became a political problem in Nigeria just like in every other developed country, managing a public health crisis in a democracy involves making a balance between protecting its' citizens and the social and economic impact of those decisions. On the long run, when the immediate crisis of the pandemic is over there will be the need to continue to make our health system more resilient, prepare people to go back to work and keep children and youth learning as well as to continue to support the health and the well-being of the citizens (www.ncdc.gov.ng).

Crime and Criminality

The increased level of criminality during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown affected the major public health intervention for Covid-19 containment, which is the wearing of face mask. Criminally minded individuals were known to have laced some face masks with some hypnotic substances which made the victims to sleep off on putting on the face masks. This made some people lose their property to criminals because they were hypnotised and their judgment impaired. Criminality became rampant in the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole during the lockdown. In a place such as Cross River State, a businessman who was dealing in electronics and many others were kidnapped during the pandemic lockdown. Kidnapping for ransom is one of the biggest organised crimes in the Niger Delta region (Ogunginka, 2020). This has become a big challenge because those who are kidnapped have had cause to pay large sums of money for their freedom. These incidents were reported across the Niger Delta region. The organised crime of kidnapping began by kidnappers taking possession of expatriates in the multinational oil companies and the oil companies paid huge ransom for their freedom (Igonikon, 2020).

The government has not been able to stem this menace and this continued even during the lockdown because of lack of deterrence mechanisms put in place by the government. Opportunistic and organised crime was targeted towards multimillionaires and rich individuals who could pay ransom. Cyber-crimes have also been on the increase during the lockdown because economic instability, low productivity, inflation and hardship increased the people's propensity for crime (Ogunyinka, 2020). Some of these crimes such as fraud, stealing peoples' identities and human trafficking increased because of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown; some crimes could be categorized as internet scam, home invasion, petty crime, terrorism and hacking or shutting down of websites, all these happened because of the imposed lockdown which led to most individuals being confined in their houses. The problem of the lockdown and fear of the unknown provided the opportunity for a spike in cases of fraud and the individuals to commit more cybercrime to acquire more money. It was revealed that between January, 2020 to April, 2020, passwords and credit card numbers were linked to fake e-mails and even websites, new information by Google also revealed that Google registered 149k active phishing websites, the number kept doubling to 293k and in March it increased to 522k (Adil, 2020).

Factors to Cushion and Prevention of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control is the country's national public health institute, with the mandate to lead the preparedness, detection and response to infectious disease outbreaks and public health emergencies. The Bill for an Act to establish the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) was signed into law in November 2018, by President Muhammadu Buhari. The aims of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (2017-2021), among others, include 'to protect the health of Nigerians through evidence-based prevention, integrated disease surveillance and response activities, using a "One Health approach", guided by research and led by a skilled workforce' (www.ncdc.gov.ng). Several measures had been instituted to contain the spread of the Covid-19 because this is a novel disease, which even the scientists and the very developed nations have not been able to contain, however efforts are being made in different countries to provide a vaccine for the virus.

Other preventive measures against Covid-19 include using behavioural change communication to promote proper hand washing and regular using of hand sanitizers, wearing of face masks and respiratory etiquette such as coughing or sneezing into the elbow or using disposable tissue, which is promptly and adequately discarded. There are also efforts at developing remote learning plans and social-emotional support systems for children, youths and educators; using text messaging, radio, internet platforms and television to deliver educational contents, and working closely with ministries of education, teachers and administrators on maintaining school communities. Some of the measures put in place to prevent the disease are stated below (www.ed.gov/coronavirus).

Stay at Home and No Visitation

The most important way of preventing the Coronavirus infection is by staying at home. The cases of Covid-19 in the Niger Delta as at the time of this research had not reached 15 per-cent of the population and this was as a result of the government order on individuals to stay at home for two weeks with inter-state borders closed down. Order against visitation was one of the preventive measures to contain the virus. Individuals were to avoid unnecessary visits to friends, family members, churches, markets, funeral and other ceremonies, among others (Agbor, 2020). Quarantine or self-Isolation for 14 days was also emphasised for those not feeling well or for those that had contact with people who eventually tested positive to Covid-19.

Social Distancing

Another important measure of prevention is the social distancing. Social or physical distancing is one of the measures of preventing Covid-19 infection. This is for individuals to take more precautions by standing at least two meters or two arm lengths away from one another (www.medium.com).

Hand Washing and Use of Sanitizer

Hand washing is one of the measures also meant to prevent Covid-19 infection. Washing of the hands or the use of alcohol based hand sanitizers when water is not available are important measures in

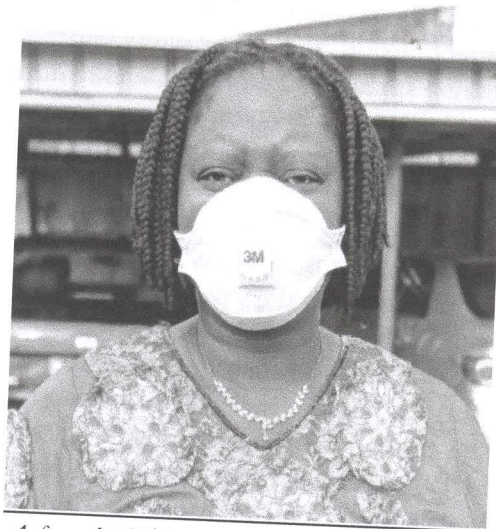
the prevention of Coronavirus infection. This is particularly important in preventing infections in the community since the disease is the stage of community spread in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Face masks

In reducing the spread of Coronavirus infection, the use of face masks is of the utmost importance since the disease is by drop let infection as well as also air borne. Because of the scarcity of surgical face masks presently, some Nigerians and nationals of some other countries began to manufacture cloth face masks for the people so that the surgical masks will be enough for the use of health workers. Since the spread of Covid-19, face masks became popular and fashionable to an extent that people began to use their clothes to make face masks to match their dress.

Face masks are used to prevent and reduce the spread of the disease between and among the people. Coronavirus as a new strain of virus that has not been previously identified anywhere in the world is transmitted from person to person through coughing, cold and sneezing which if inhaled into the lungs can cause serious health problems (www.ncdc.gov.ng). It is important to note that the face shield without a face mask cannot prevent the spread of infection. An individual is better protected from Covid-19 if the face shield is used together with the face mask. As shown below, it is important to practice frequent hand washing, social distancing and respiratory hygiene, as these help to prevent the spread of this highly infectious and contagious disease. The following pictures show the differences between the face shields and the face masks:





A face shield/face mask and a face mask only; Source: Author, 2020.

Face Shield

The use of the face shield is significant to the prevention of Covid-19 especially among health care workers. Most Niger Delta people and Nigerians at large in recent times have started using the face shield alone in place of the face mask because it is more fashionable and also more comfortable to wear than the face mask. The face shields are also important but should be used alongside the face masks and mostly so among the health care professionals to prevent that part of the body such as the mouth, nose, eyes and the face in general from infectious fluids like saliva, sputum and other body fluids. It is important to use the face shield in combination with original surgical masks for optimal protection. Even if the N95 face mask which offers the best protection is being used, the face shields should also be used for maximum protection and prevention of cross infection. This helps to limit the spread of Covid-19 especially where there is no physical distancing in public places such as banks, markets, supermarkets, commercial transportation and worship centres. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control advocates that the face shields should not be used alone (www.ncdc.gov.ng). Setting up of more isolation centres and treatment centres and more laboratories for testing Covid-19 are necessary as this will help to quickly diagnose the disease and quickly place those with the disease on appropriate treatment.

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Conclusion

This chapter examined the impact of Covid-19 pandemic to the Niger Delta Region and Nigeria at large. It revealed that an outbreak of the novel Covid-19 disease is transmitted from one person to the other by contact, respiratory spread, droplets and the magnitude and speed of the Corona Virus pandemic collapsed the economy and society at large. The lockdown tremendously affected the economic, political, cultural and social life of the people because of the traumatic and drastic changes it brought about to all the sectors, spheres of life and livelihood. The pandemic plunged the Niger Delta region into an economic recession and inflation causing socio-economic crisis in the region. The lockdown disrupted economic activities causing a lot of untold suffering and hardships. The Niger Delta Region and its people will not be the same for a long time to come because of the era of the "new normal" brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 vaccine and treatment trials are being facilitated in the developed countries to contain the pandemic but no fruitful result has been achieved so far and it will also require some time for the mandatory trials before certification of the vaccine for use in humans. But apart from the vaccine which when discovered will eventually bring a halt to the pandemic, health awareness programmes and appropriate behavioural change and communication approaches are required as well in containing the pandemic.

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