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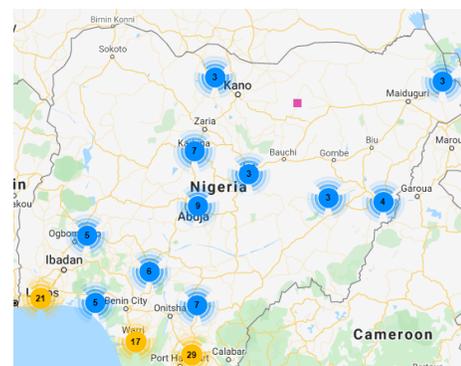
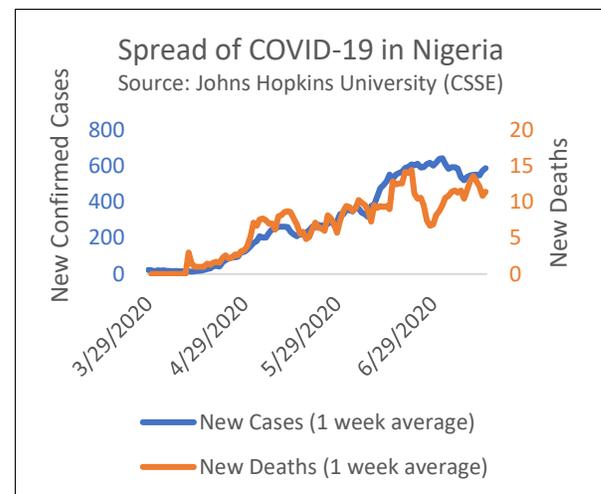
NIGERIA COVID BRIEFING

A Stress Test of Nigerian Resilience

Introduction

As COVID-19 began to spread beyond the initial epicenters in Europe and China earlier this year, there were concerns that vulnerable African countries could face especially significant disruptions beyond just the health sector, to include economic pressures and budgetary stress which could impact public services and security, notwithstanding the effect of public health restrictions on livelihoods.

So far, Nigeria has managed the health aspects of the crisis much better than many countries, certainly better than the United States, based on the number of reported cases and deaths, due to a strong and proactive approach to the prevention of community spread. But the cascading effects of the pandemic are taking their toll. Before this shock, Nigeria was already suffering a recession triggered by a collapse in global oil prices in 2014-2016. While World Bank statistics showed annual GDP growth had recovered to around 2.2%¹, the country still faces



Protests and confrontations over COVID-19 restrictions, March-June 2020. Data from [ACLED](#), Nigeria Watch, P4P, CIEDPD CWC formatted on the [P4P Peace Map](#)

¹ "Nigeria in Times of COVID-19: Laying Foundations for a Strong Recovery," World Bank Group, Nigeria Development Update, June 2020.

a number of vulnerabilities that are only made more difficult to address under current conditions.

These include poverty (nearly a quarter of the population, some 83 million, are living in poverty), insurgency in the northeast, an underdeveloped and thinly spread health care sector (particularly in the north and northeast), group-based tensions in the oil-rich south, and a heavy dependence on remittances. Prior to COVID-19, and associated travel restrictions, the transportation and trade sectors had already contracted in Q4 of 2019. This was partially due to borders being closed in August 2019, in an attempt to stem smuggling, as well as the continued insecurity in the northeast and from farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt.² However, despite the vulnerabilities, Nigeria has

a wealth of resilience that, if well managed, can mitigate the short-term risks posed by the pandemic and position the country for recovery in the long term.

A COMPLEX CRISIS

As of July 2020, approximately four months since the first confirmed cases were detected in Nigeria, the pandemic continues to spread rapidly, reaching over 600 new confirmed cases per day as of July 1st, with nearly 700 fatalities. The disease is thus far largely concentrated in Nigeria's biggest cities, with the state of Lagos having over forty percent of the country's confirmed cases, followed by the Federal Capital Territory, Kano, Oyo (home to Ibadan, Nigeria's third largest city), Rivers (Port Harcourt),



and Edo (Benin City).³ In addition, there are concerns that a lack of testing is failing to give a full picture, especially in Kano's overwhelmed health system where a presidential task force found 80 percent of tests were positive in late April.

As in other countries, COVID-19 has had a severe impact on the Nigerian economy. The IMF recently

revised estimates of the country's recession from a 3.4% contraction of GDP to 5.4% in 2020. In addition, the Nigerian Minister of Finance, Budget, and National Planning, Zainab Ahmed, said that in a worst-case scenario, one could even see a fall of 8.9%. This economic downturn is not only due to the direct effects of COVID-19 but also a plunge in oil prices exacerbated by a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia in March after a failure to agree

² Ibid, pg. 4.

³ Figures drawn from the West African Health Organization, retrieved 25 June 2020.

to coordinated cuts in production. Then after OPEC+ did ultimately coordinate production cuts, the global COVID-19 crises led to massive lockdowns across the world, vastly reducing demand and keeping oil prices low.

Unrelated to COVID-19, Nigeria has seen a surge in violence in the second quarter of 2020, which was concentrated in the north, particularly in Borno, Katsina, and Sokoto, but extended to Kaduna. Though not related to COVID-19, security services have already been given the additional burden of helping to enforce COVID restrictions, stretching their general capacities to respond. National Security Adviser Muhammed Monguno stated that this renewed violence “has put the military and other security outfits in difficult situations” particularly in the northeast.

Upcoming gubernatorial elections in Edo (September 2020) and Ondo State (October 2020) will take place in this context of mounting health, economic, and security pressures, making it all the more important to ensure that the process is seen to be legitimate to avoid any outbreaks of restiveness. Based on the vote share in the 2019 presidential election, these gubernatorial races are likely to be closely contested. In Ondo State, incumbent governor Oluwarotimi Akeredolu is a member of the APC, but the state party is currently in the middle of fierce infighting between Akeredolu and the Unity Forum opposed to his re-election. In Edo, incumbent governor Godwin Obaseki recently switched parties from the APC to the PDP and is seeking re-election.

NIGERIA'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Nigeria's initial response to COVID-19 was strong. The country reported its first case on February 27th, 2020, and quickly identified and quarantined 60 people who had been in contact with the infected person. On March 18th, Nigeria imposed travel restrictions on 13 countries and

Photo by: PIUS UTOMI EKPEI/AFP via Getty Images



More than **800** health workers have been infected by the virus, according to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control

several states banned large public gatherings and/or announced the closure of schools. Over the subsequent days, more states imposed similar restrictions. By March 23rd, when Nigeria reported its first COVID-19-related death, all international airports and land borders had been closed, passenger rail service had been suspended, and several states had banned all public gatherings. Several states quickly closed their state borders and imposed curfews, culminating in the federal government placing Abuja, Lagos, and Ogun states – the initial centers of the virus – under lockdown on March 29th. On April 22nd, all state governors unanimously agreed to ban interstate travel for two weeks.

These preventative measures had widespread buy-in; both the Christian Association of Nigerian (CAN) and the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) supported the lockdowns and worked with state and local governments to encourage adherence and disseminate accurate information ensuring a relatively slow pandemic spread inside the country. It was not until March 29th that Nigeria reached 100 confirmed cases. While serious, the growth rate has been relatively low compared to that of many countries.

At the end of May, the rate of confirmed cases in Nigeria was only 1-2 percent of those in the United States and Europe.

However, restrictions are only sustainable for so long, given the impact on livelihoods and varying prevalence from one state to the next. On May 7th, officials in the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control fled Kogi State after Governor Yahaya Bello threatened to put them in isolated quarantine for two weeks, while asserting that there were no cases of COVID-19 in the state. Later, the *Vanguard* newspaper detailed widespread anecdotes of failures of social distancing measures in more than half of Nigeria's states.⁵ This was despite lockdowns in place in many states.

On May 31st, President Buhari's Presidential Task Force (PTF) lifted most of the restrictions that had been put in place, with the exception of the ban on inter-state travel and school closures. The PTF recommended that Governors be in charge of managing COVID-19 in their respective states to allow for flexibility, despite concerns raised by the Nigerian Medical Association about the potential for the disease to spread from state to state.

Putting governors in charge of collecting COVID-19 samples and sending them for testing has exposed unevenness in capacity and/or commitment. Professor Isa Abubakar, the director of the Centre for Infectious Diseases Research at Kano's Bayero University, attributes a startling reduction in confirmed cases in his state entirely to a reduction in the number of samples being sent for testing rather than a reduction in the rate of infection. Interstate tensions have increased, with the Kaduna and Plateau state governments accusing the Kano

state government of deporting infected individuals into their state, after which the Kano state government leveled counter-accusations.

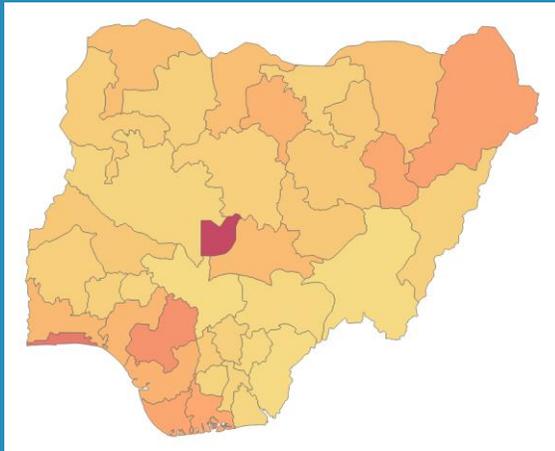
In addition, concerns have surfaced surrounding the securitization of public health restrictions, with isolated reports emerging from March onwards of police, military, and other security agents harassing and assaulting doctors and nurses traveling to test or treat patients. This was reported in Bloomberg News in July, quoting the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors.⁶ The report further quoted the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission and the Centre for Disease Control that in the first half of March alone, 11 people died after contracting the virus but another 18 were killed by members of security forces. The dead included members of the special Covid-19 task forces deployed to various states. In Lagos in May, a 16-year old at a bus stop was reportedly killed by a stray bullet fired by security forces enforcing lockdown measures. Meanwhile, there were multiple reports of protests by market traders, commercial drivers, worshippers, and community members over restrictions in several states, some of which turned violent, as well as some reported looting of emergency relief materials.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in rising rates of domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Nigeria. According to the PIND Foundation, the Niger Delta has experienced alarming rise in reports of domestic and sexual violence, including against children, highlighting cases in Imo, Delta, and Akwa Ibom states.⁷ According to a June *Niger Delta Conflict Briefing* focused on Delta State, "Pre-existing vulnerabilities and risks of sexual violence could be exacerbated as the coronavirus pandemic

⁵ "COVID-19: Nigerians shun social distancing". *Vanguard*. May 9, 2020.

⁶ "Nigerian Security Response to Covid Is Deadlier Than the Disease," by Ruth Olurounbi July 6 2020, Bloomberg News; available at: <https://www.bloombergquint.com/politics/nigerian-security-response-to-covid-is-deadlier-than-the-disease>.

⁷ PIND Foundation, Niger Delta Conflict Briefings, May 3-9: <https://pindfoundation.org/niger-delta-weekly-conflict-update-may-3-9-2020/>; June 7-13: <https://pindfoundation.org/niger-delta-weekly-conflict-update-june-07-13-2020/> and June 28-July 4: <https://pindfoundation.org/niger-delta-weekly-conflict-update-june-28-july-04-2020/>.



Heatmap of confirmed deaths from COVID-19 per capita in Nigeria by state.

continues.” In the northeast of the country, particularly in camps for refugees and displaced persons, an increase in SGBV has further exacerbated the extreme vulnerability of women and children. Lagos and the FCT have also reported a rising number of cases, with resources already stretched across the country and travel restrictions preventing survivors and those under threat seeking help or shelter. The closure of schools has made the situation more dire for the poorest households in many parts of the country, with fears that the pandemic will result in an increase in child marriage. Already 44% of girls are married by the age of 18, but with some 18 million female students out of school since the pandemic began, marrying daughters off to wealthy men in order to relieve financial burdens is likely to become more prevalent.⁸

PROGNOSIS

Despite these vulnerabilities and cascading effects of the pandemic across the social, economic, governance, and security sectors, Nigeria is resilient. For decades, Nigeria has weathered a range of shocks and pressures through its wealth of human and social capital. Civil society organizations, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, entrepreneurs, and leaders at every level engage through a host of different platforms and mechanisms to adapt and innovate as needed for society to thrive. This resilience is needed now as much as ever. Accurate and timely data is difficult to acquire, hindering effective tracking of the disease’s progress, and impeding decision-making. This is particularly concerning as COVID-19 spreads out from the better-resourced metropolitan areas into areas with conflict-stressed health systems, particularly in the northeast.

⁸ “The shadow pandemic: Gender-based violence and COVID-19,” International Growth Centre, May 19, 2020 available at: <https://www.theigc.org/blog/the-shadow-pandemic-gender-based-violence-and-covid-19/>.

Oil prices have somewhat recovered from their historic lows, doubling between April and June. Nevertheless, most analysts expect little improvement in prices until next year. However, these projections are more uncertain than usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have serious effects on both the supply and demand side of the oil market, particularly if there is a second wave in countries that have begun to resume normal economic activity. The Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has announced two medium- to long-term initiatives that should improve the economy and add resiliency. They plan to find ways to reduce Nigeria's high production costs and also develop the nascent natural gas industry to take advantage of its over five trillion m³ reserves, which are several times larger than its crude oil reserves.

In the meantime, budgets are tight. 99% of Nigeria's revenues were devoted to debt servicing in Q1 2020, and in March and April, the country's credit rating was downgraded by both S&P and Fitch. With limited budget flexibility, the federal government in June announced 40% cuts to funding for local, primary healthcare services already overtaxed by the pandemic and which saw doctor's strikes in March and June.

The economic and health crisis are likely to make it more difficult to address the security challenges in Nigeria. The Presidential Amnesty

Program has played a crucial role in keeping the peace in the Niger Delta, but other parts of the country have seen growing violence, particularly in the North.

Record violence in President Buhari's home state of Katsina is particularly troubling for the government and marks the collapse of a controversial peace deal between Katsina's governor, Aminu Bello Masari and bandits, signed in August 2019. June protests specifically targeted Buhari, burning down one of his old campaign billboards. While Nigeria may see some temporary relief in the near term – the second quarter of 2020 represents the peak of violence over the past two years. Worse are reports that violence in the Middle Belt between herders and farmers in recent years is merging with the banditry in the northwest.¹

These economic and social pressures will also define the backdrop of the upcoming off-year elections, the most significant of which are the gubernatorial elections in Edo and Ondo states this fall. Both states have been spared serious violence thus far, but there have been protests over COVID-19 restrictions and economic conditions, and rising grievances which could be politicized. It is more critical than ever to proactively work to prevent election violence and prevent democratic backsliding across the country in 2020 and 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promoting and ensuring citizen security and safety requires enormous judgement and professionalism in law enforcement as well as social welfare programs to mitigate the effects, while acknowledging the challenges in doing so. Civil society engagement and efforts at education have helped bridge this gap and should be considered again.
2. As responsibility for testing and mitigation of COVID-19 has now devolved to the state level, citizen trust in the government is critical. Again, civil society has a large role to play here, building upon a common desire to contain and mitigate the virus. Regular briefings and engagement via social media, even if held virtually, can be key to dispelling myths and rumours and rebuilding citizen trust and awareness. Civil society played a large role in educating the public and keeping populations informed during the Ebola Virus Disease, so precedent already exists. Now what is needed are similar platforms and mobilization, helping to keep the public informed and the government accountable.
3. Nigerians will continue to remain vulnerable across a multitude of social, economic and security dimensions if the response to the COVID-19 pandemic is narrowly focused on emergency response without an accompanying short- and medium-term strategy to address the systemic vulnerabilities already existent in the country, and exacerbated by the pandemic. In the short term, according to the World Bank, this should include rapidly expanding testing to Nigeria's poorest, and most vulnerable, communities, and, the consideration of cash transfers or in-kind contributions such as ensuring access to essential food and medical supplies. In the medium term, given the uneven individual and household exposure to the virus, in terms of both health implications and economic impacts, a policy agenda that focuses first and foremost on the most vulnerable areas, to shore up their resilience, will be critical in allowing the country to move forward as a whole.
4. The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on women, girls and Nigeria's most vulnerable populations has been evidenced in reporting. It is critical moving forward that women and girls be targeted for specific social and economic protection and recovery efforts, including ensuring their safety and security in the short-term. Again, civil society groups in Nigeria can play an essential bridging role here, helping to direct efforts and ensure accountability, so that targeted funds reach their intended recipients.
5. With the spread of COVID-19, the health sector in Nigeria is in need of additional investment. While the financial investment must come largely from government sources and international partners, civil society can still play a critical role, particularly in supporting community health worker programs, such as CHIPS in Nasarawa state. Civil society can also help liaise between public health programs and the community to promote the efficient use of available resources as well as raising awareness of unmet needs in the community.