

COVID 19 LOCKDOWN IN NIGERIA- FLATTENING THE CURVE

President Muhammadu Buhari, PMB, on the 29th of March 2020 pronounced a lockdown of Lagos and Ogun States and Abuja, for an initial 14days from the 30th of March to the 13th of April 2020 in order to flatten the curve of the spread of the global pandemic of Corona Virus, Covid 19. within the country. The number of confirmed cases on the 29th March stood at 97 in the country while the first fatality was recorded on the 23rd of March 2020. Majority of the confirmed cases were recorded from Lagos, Ogun and Abuja and this was the anchor on which the lockdown was premised. The President informed the nation that he had taken the professional advice of the Federal Ministry of Health and the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, NCDC to the end that a cessation of movement save for those tailored towards provision of essential services was necessary to flatten the curve of the spread. He noted that this measure will cause hardship and inconvenience to the populace, but in as much as it is a matter of life and death, it has to be carried out. The containment period was to be used to identify, trace and isolate all those who had come into contact with confirmed cases and also to ensure that these people do not come into contact with other members of the public.

Following an upsurge in the number of recorded cases in the affected areas, the President on the 13th of April 2020 further extended the lockdown period for another 14days until the 27th of April, 2020. During the initial 14days, there had been a lot of complaint from Nigerians who had been forced to stay at home without the commensurate provision to meet the hunger needs of citizens who did not have any reservoir of food to depend on. This was brought more home when one considers the latest data from international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, IMF to the effect that about 60% of the population was already living below poverty line before the advent of the virus. This is in addition to the percentage of the citizens who has to go out daily to work in order to be able to feed their families. In effect, this brought to the fore what has now been dubbed as the classic

survival contention between the hunger virus and the corona virus.

The Lockdown measure was also employed by some of the other States in Nigeria who took to shutting down while also closing their borders against people coming in from other parts of the country. Thus, the economy of the country has been majorly inactive. The World Health Organisation, WHO had described Covid 19 as a War without a single bullet or gun. Indeed, it has proven so far to be a war without human soldiers, borders, war room, ceasefire agreements and or sacred zones. WHO encouraged nations of the world to take urgent and drastic measures to stop the spread. There is no gainsaying that when a war is going on, the way of life that was never even given a thought becomes the normal. Everyman goes into the survival mode and nearly every other consideration is driven to the backwaters of life and living. During a war, no government has to tell anyone to stay indoors as people even hide in the basement so for as long as hostilities persist. Citizens do not insist on their freedom to move about but would be ever too quick to deny themselves of it in order to remain alive. Businesses are destroyed, shops are looted and economies are adversely affected as Governments even have to beg for food and the basic necessities of life for its citizens from other countries and international donors as all form of production gives way. Life is generally altered in the negative and it becomes a matter not of who is right or wrong, but who is left at the end of the day.

Globally, the number of confirmed cases has reached over two and five hundred million, 2, 500,000 while recorded deaths have gone over the twenty thousand, 20,000 mark. Most countries affected, especially in Europe and the Americas have admitted the fact that they failed to take drastic measures to stop the spread of the virus when it made an inroad into them. This has led to more countries employing the lockdown measure to confront the virus. Looking inwards, with the communal way of living that exists in Nigeria, the lockdown has so far proved effective in managing the community spread of the virus. Our public transport system is such that the social distancing and avoidance of physical contact with people will be practically impossible to enforce. Public mass

gatherings for celebratory and religious purposes will also have proved impossible to stop if the lockdown had not been put in place.

The President in his national address on the 13th of March, 2020 noted that the NCDC had informed him that community transmission had been on the increase as a result of person to person contact and inter states movement that had been going on almost unhindered despite the lockdown. He went on to roll out the plans and actions so far taken by the Federal Government to provide palliatives for the indigent members of the society, while also urging States to do whatever they can to ameliorate the effect of the lockdown on Nigerians. This included the conditional cash transfer, release of grains to be distributed to all the States from the National Grain Reserve, loan repayment waivers amongst other measures.

The President on the 27th of April extended the lockdown in Lagos and Ogun States and the FCT by another seven days and announced that the gradual easing of the lockdown would begin on the 4th of May, while also imposing a national curfew from 8pm to 6am daily on the whole country and the ban on interstate travels. The Presidential Task Force, PTF, a body set up by the Federal Government to coordinate national response to the pandemic on the 30th of April announced the modus operandi with a view to ensuring that the gradual opening up of the economy does not steal the gains so far made in the containment of the spread of the disease financial institutions and some other industry specific organisations asked to open between the hours of 9am to 2pm, pharmaceutical companies to open for 24hours and other essential services corporations.

However, the people have not been in full compliance with the safety measures announced, which includes the wearing of facemasks in public, maintaining social and physical distance from one another amongst others. This unsavoury turn of events has made the PTF to threaten the imminence of the imposition of another period of lockdown as the figure of confirmed cases keep rising by the day. Nigeria now has over 4,000 confirmed cases with about 200 deaths.

CONCLUSION

The President had itemised the Government's approach to Covid 19 to be essentially in 2 steps- First, to protect the lives of Nigerians and residents living here and second, to preserve the livelihoods of workers and business owners. This essentially captures the rationale for the lockdown as been necessary for the continuing existence of the nation in the face of the invisible Covid 19 army which does not discriminate between the poor and the rich, young and old and only moves when people move from one location to another.

For more information, please contact

Ayodele Kusamotu: ayo.kusamotu@kusamotu.com

Adeyemi Akingbade: yemi@kusamotu.com



Kusamotu & Kusamotu

(The Greenfish Chambers)

2A, Udi Street, Osborne Foreshore Estate,
Ikoyi, Lagos State.

Email: enquiries@kusamotu.com

Website: www.kusamotu.com

Tel: +234 (0) 8147203068

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