COVID-2019 – LESSONS TO LEARN IN AFRICA (SHORT COMMUNICATION)
A CRITICAL REVIEW ON THE POTENTIAL EFFECT OF COVID-2019 ON AFRICA AND LESSONS TO BE LEARNT.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the outbreak of the deadly pandemic of Coronavirus in 2019 (COVID-2019), the whole world has been thrown to a sudden state of panic, uncertainty and high level of insecurity.

This has forced governments and organizations globally to take strict measure to safeguard citizens, employees, families and individuals from either contracting the disease or spreading it. Some of these measures include: travel bans, school closure, cancellation of events (fairs, seminars, conferences, etc), banning public gathering, work-from-home policies, quarantines, self-isolation amongst others.

These measures listed above, have forced various organizations to deep into their wealth of innovation (as a contingency plan) in other to keep business running and generate steady revenue – However, some businesses are still feeling the heat, as their business is driven by physical presence (e.g; boutique hotels and airlines- Coronavirus: More flights cancelled by Virgin, Ryanair and others, BBC News online 16th March 2020).

The amazing part is, even with the high level of unpreparedness that COVID-2019 met the world, many companies have been able to switch to virtual means of transacting business and still maintain revenue generation. A very good example is the way Universities switched to online learning (deploying all academic programmes through an effective and efficient online platform) or the way companies have activated the "work-from-home policy" with good communication via online platforms (e.g; Skype FB) and allocate target-based activities.

For the past few weeks, the world has been monitoring the situation (continents & countries infected, number of cases recorded per country/continent, survivals, mortality rates, government policies, economy etc)– Many countries especially in Europe, Asia and America have been affected by COVID-2019, but Africa seems to be on a safe and different level.

African has recorded some random cases of COVID-2019 (few numbers have been recorded in some African countries, except for Egypt with over 50+ cases), these numbers could be seen as negligible due to the fact that most cases are in few numbers, with no mortality, and the infected persons have either been declared negative or been stable.

Many online reports have reviewed the possibility of Africa been at a very high risk, due to the poor health facilities and poverty that has ravaged the continent for decades.

But this particular review looks deeper at the potential effect of COVID-2019 on Africa, should the virus spread massively beyond the present state.

Since the recording of few cases in some African countries, the conversation of COVID-2019 has been strengthened more on the port sand

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borders, and detailed scrutiny of inbound visitors / returnees – however, everything on the ground remained the same. Business activities still go on as normal, public gatherings still hold, event organizers still continue with the event plans, people still resume to work, schools still in session etc. in fact, everything is normal on the ground.

Hence, the big question everyone is asking! **Would Africa be able to survive if the virus spreads further and strict measure as seen in Europe are enforced?** To answer these questions, I will be looking at Education, the labour and the economy.

EDUCATION:

Unlike the western world where online learning and blended learning has been gradually introduced into the educational system over the years, and has now become normalized in the education system. Africa still perceive these innovations as alien. For example, the most populous nation in Africa (Nigeria), has not, till date, deployed either online learning or blended learning into its educational system nor has online learning been accepted by the education authorities, this also applies to some African countries. "NUC: Online degrees still not accepted in Nigeria; The Cable online publication September 15, 2016". Learning is still seen as effective when conducted face-to-face. In fact, some overzealous institutions that had tried to deploy these innovative style of learning had failed due to lack of expertise or poor infrastructure (epileptic power, poor internet reception, unskilled web developers and non-supporting government policies), other critics of this style of learning, have questioned the quality of education that will be delivered online. Finally, the Government and the education authorities have not accepted online learning as an approved learning style. But they hypocritically, hire those that travelled abroad to study online.

ADEDAMOLA OLOKETUYI – a Nigerian education consultant based in Germany (A reviewer of this publication) argues that the essence of education is not only in the academic learning but also in the physical observation and interaction. He has therefore attributed this to the reason why African institutions find it difficult to adopt the online or blended learning style into their educational system. He further stresses that the deliberate non-usage of these alternative learning options, is more cultural than that of negligence. Adedamola insists that's online and blended learning are only temporary options, and they cannot be more effective than the physical (classroom-based learning).

I imagine an Africa, where schools have to close down indefinitely, due to any kind of outbreak. What other learning options would be deployed as an immediate alternative to mitigate the situation? What would be the faith of the students? What would be done to ensure that the learning cycle of the students are not affected, elongated unnecessarily or terminated?

In Nigeria, ASUU, NASU, Student Union, Labour strikes and Religious disputes takes place on a regular basis, which often times, causes institutions to pause academic programmes. Since the only option of learning has been limited to the face-to-face style, academic activities are truncated and study life cycle distorted.

In situations where unnecessary disruption of academic activities due to unavailable face-to-face learning, students become redundant and more useless. Sadly, a good number of these students, due to idleness, engage in crime, and other fraudulent activities and the ladies engage in unhealthy sexual relationships that leads to unwanted pregnancies. (These pregnancies are part of the main cause of the high increase in population growth in Africa)

LABOUR AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Even before COVID-2019, "Work-from-home" had been practiced by some multinational organizations including Media houses, Universities, Tech companies and many more. This has made it easy for companies to provide their services to clients in many countries by hiring employees from those locations, provide them with access to data, working equipment, then allocate target-based activities to their roles, which could be appraised periodically.

However, indigenous organizations still find it hard to replicate this style of innovative work model. Instead, they prefer all employees to be on the ground (in the same building or location). Some companies even go as far as hiring more staffs than they need for a department or role, this then results to duplication of work and less productivity. This also replicates itself in African governments and ministries.

Some indigenous companies in Africa do not have the infrastructure to manage or appraise productivity from diaspora, while other do not believe in the efficiency of employees outside the organization workplace. A few organizations have

attempted stepping up their game and have some employees hired outside the organization workplace, but it has been difficult to achieve much with this, because some of these employees are lazy and dishonest or do not understand the "Work-from-home" concept. A good number of these employees see "Work-from-home" as an opportunity to relax at home and swipe through their computers when they feel like.

In a situation where a virus or a terrorist attack ravage the continent, that requires measures like "Work-from-home" to be implemented with urgency, most companies will be affected massively. First the ideology of target-based activities from diaspora has not been adopted in work culture in the continent – physical presence still drives everything. Africa is a 3rd world continent and most of the countries in Africa are still under developed. Hence, the infrastructures that could drive a result-oriented Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, employee management, effective task appraisals and communication are not available for these companies to successfully integrate into their operational systems. –This means that most indigenous organizations in Africa might not survive a pandemic such as COVID-2019 This is a huge back drop in the labour market of Africa.

ECONOMY:

Although most companies globally have been affected economically. There have been cases of pay cuts, sick-leaves without pay, staff reduction etc. On the other hand, governments have also been lamenting about the adverse effect the COVID-2019 has, and would have on the economy. But we have also seen the immediate and urgent activation of some economic policies to salvage the situation, prepare for tougher times ahead and most likely generate revenue.

For example: USA President Trump has directed the U.S Department of Energy to purchase crude oil for the strategic petroleum reserve. (CNBC publication 13/03/2020). The US has also been working on producing the vaccine that would prevent/cure the pandemic, I am sure Chine and other European countries might be working on the same project. If this comes out successful, that translates to more economic empowerment for them. They will sell these drugs at high costs or provide them as aids for natural recourse as compensation.

While these are going on in the international scene, African government are busy banning importation of generators, fighting over which political party holds on to governance, trying to fix numerous bad roads that had presumed been fixed in the past, dethroning monarchs over alleged insubordination amongst other ridiculous activities some African governments have engaged in the past few weeks.

This shows that Africa, cannot withstand a pandemic such as COVID-2019 ravaging the continent. Little wonder why, even the least affected African country is taken more strict and decisive measure to ensure the virus does not penetrate let alone spread in the country.

The main wealth of African is in her human resource. If anything should hinder free flow of movement, the continent will be thrown into an economic disarray.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the points listed above, it is evident that Africa is not prepared for an outbreak like COVID-2019. The continent already has many issues to deal with (such as: unhealthy ethnic and religious diversity, terrorism, high level of corruption, an increasing number of youths with misplaced priorities, poor health sector, political and economic invasion etc.)so the only thing African governments can afford to do now, is to vehemently stop the virus from penetrating or spreading.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

African governments, institutions, and companies should learn from the way their counterparts in Europe, America and Asia mitigated the situation of COVID-2019 with virtual innovative methods of doing things and still achieved same results or event more.

If African entities and companies feel comfortable with the traditional ways of doing things without the need for change, then they should be ready to really beef-up health security by improving the health condition of the continent, and ensure that the land borders are secure. Else, African countries should actually be looking at gradually implementing innovative ways of learning, working and transacting business. We never know the kind of contagious diseases or terror attacks that might infiltrate the continent sooner or later.

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