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## A Study of the Results of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the Nigerian Maritime Workers

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### ABSTRACT

Findings have shown that the recent lockdown of the economy and restriction of movements in Nigeria, due to Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic, seriously affected the Nigerian shipping, Aviation industries, Land transport sector, Financial, Health and Educational sectors. Import and export operations were hampered. The Nigerian maritime workers; mariners and seafarers were mentally and psychologically disturbed. Some were stranded in their various workplaces; aboard ships, platform rigs and stayed beyond their agreed contractual terms. They, therefore, lack social support from their family members and friends. Similarly, they had little or no support from their management, who were more concerned about contract execution than the welfare of their work force. This paper, however, is supporting the recommendation that the living and working conditions of the Nigerian Maritime workers and seafarers stranded and those whose salary and promotion arrears have not been paid during this pandemic should be given utmost attention. This should include applying pragmatic approach on the facilitation of sea workers' health insurance schemes and incentives.

Keywords: COVID-19, Seafarer, Pandemic

### INTRODUCTION

The novel SARS-COV-2 corona virus (now known as COVID-19) was first reported in the city of Wuhan, in China, December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019 and has since spread to virtually over two hundred and fifty countries of the world. Consequently, on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic (WHO,2020)<sup>[1]</sup>. As of today (July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020) not fewer than fifteen million cases and over six hundred thousand deaths had been reported worldwide. COVID-19 has seriously plunged the world economy into a resounding jeopardy. It has badly affected every sector of the world economy.

According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the first corona virus (Index case) was confirmed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2020 in Lagos state, by the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital. The infected individual who arrived into the country on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February from Milan, Italy who showed symptoms of the virus. He was quarantined at the Lagos State Biosecurity Facilities in which samples were taken for testing. He was treated at the Infectious Disease

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Hospital in Yaba, Lagos - Nigeria. And ever since the coronavirus cases in Nigeria has be on the rise, as at 23rd July cases recorded is not fewer than 38,945 and deaths cases amounting to 604, (NCDC, 2020) <sup>[2]</sup>.

This study has, therefore, examined the results of this pandemic on the Nigerian maritime, aviation and health workers. These include effects on their mental health, the psychological and the pecuniary outcomes of this on shipment of cargoes from countries where the outbreak had been reported. Attempt is made to quantify the magnitude of fear of transmission, symptoms of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and distress associated with this disease on the Nigerian transport workers.

Beyond the tragic health hazards of the pandemic, this paper has reviewed the economic uncertainties, strangulation and disruption the pandemic has brought on the global economy. The slowdown in the global economy and lockdown in almost all major economic power houses of the world such as US, UK, China and Nigeria has taken its negative toll on the global demand for oil and services. The paper also noted as discretionary spending by consumers continue to decline, while cruise companies, tourism and hospitality industry are facing declining demand and patronage. Consequently, this has placed a huge job loss particularly on the maritime and aviation industry.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

The methodology adopted in this paper was to do an in-depth study of all literature materials dealing with the history of the COVID-19 pandemic, its results on world economy and view how it affects the Nigerian shipping industry and the maritime and aviation workers.

Efforts had, therefore, been made to point out the stepwise results of the pandemic on the world economy. Then it looked concisely at the actual results of the pandemic on the Nigerian economy, the Nigerian Transport Industry, as well as, the Nigerian maritime and aviation, in particular.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**1. Paraphernalia of coronavirus on the world economy:** COVID-19 pandemic is an economic woe to the global market and economy. It has led to the collapse of the global economy in many ways; as explained below:

**1.1 Crack-up of Stock Markets:** Huge alterations in stock markets, has negatively affected the value of individual savings accounts. The FTSE, Dow Jones Industrial Average and the Nikkei have all seen huge falls since the outbreak began, on 31 December 2019. The Dow and the FTSE have their biggest drops in the first three months of the year, since 33 years ago. Investors withheld their capital for fear of the ravaging effect of COVID-19 pandemic. This has a devastating consequences that will jeopardize economic growth with the attendant fear that the international communities' actions may not be enough to stop the deterioration. In response, central banks in many countries, including the United States of America, United Kingdom, and even Nigeria, slashed interest rates to encourage food security. That should, in theory, make borrowing cheaper and encourage spending to temporally boost the economy, but the extent in which this measure can yield favorable and expected result in developing countries such as Nigeria, is a serious source of concern.

**1.2 Upsurge in the Rate of Unemployment:** Jones et al (2020) <sup>[4]</sup> reported that in the United States, the number of people filing for unemployment hit a record high, indicating an end to a decade of expansion for one of the world's largest economies. Approximately, one million people in the United Kingdom applied for benefits in just two weeks of the pandemic there; at the end of March. Over one hundred and fifty million Nigerians agitating for substantial palliatives, to help assuage the effect of hunger; while fighting COVID-19 pandemic. Some banks, paper media and other organizations in Nigeria have reduced their staff strength in order to ameliorate the effect of the pandemic on their operational cost. Also, it must

be noted that the spread of COVID-19 poses a big threat on people working in the informal sector. Equally affected are many small businesses, which serve as the major source of livelihood for many Africans. It was very pronounced in many parts of Nigerian. No doubt, the situation has spiked up unemployment and poverty to a triple rate in Nigeria.

**1.3 World Oil Prices Out of order:** Nigeria is an oil-driven economy. The global demand for petroleum based products declined, as lockdowns across the world kept people indoor and all factories and major transport modes are closed down. It should, however, be noted that prior to the pandemic crude oil price had already been affected by the row between Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia. COVID-19 pandemic came to further drive the price down to the lowest level since left 18 years; \$20. This is had a huge negative impact on the economy of many oil producing countries; Nigeria inclusive.

**1.4 Crack-up of Economic Activities:** As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world economy has suffered a triple set back. Many countries are likely to experience economic recession worse than ever before the pandemic. Many economic analyst pointedly envisaged triple poverty rate in the nation Nigeria, reasons are not farfetched as many private sectors are seriously in the verge of labor force down size, commercial transport operators hiking transport fare without increase in petroleum cost, high cost of dollar exchange. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has postulated that the global economy will shrink by 3% this year. The IMF described this decline as the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Although it is said that the corona virus has plunged the world into a "crisis like no other", experts however believe that global growth would rise to 5.8% next year, if the pandemic fades in the second half of 2020, (Jones et al ,2020)<sup>[5]</sup>.

**1.5 Technological Cataclysm:** The pandemic has made many governments all over the world to take drastic technological measures to contain its spread. Employees have been urged to work from home, where possible. This has gone to an extent that the Nigerian Government has mandated all government parastatals, including educational sector to embark on virtual learning. Many countries have also started thinking inwards with regards to technological development. Even, shares in technology companies, such as Zoom have economic upturn at the moment, as more people and big organizations depend on video conferencing and email to hold meetings or get tasks done. Lecturers and teachers, now teach their students via zoom meeting and Google classroom, classdojo, just to mention a few. The demand for online shopping and entertainment has also soared as people stay indoors. Amazon's share price has hit new highs, while streaming platform Netflix was at one point a more valuable company than oil giant ExxonMobil (Jones et al 2020)<sup>[6]</sup>.

**1.6 Transportation Sector:** Resulting from the pandemic, all modes of transportation were banned. This had a great toll on maritime, aviation and land transportation modes. All sea and air ports, as well as land borders were shut down, with consequent great economic losses. These sectors have been badly damaged, with airlines cutting flights and customers cancelling business trips and holidays. Governments around the world have introduced travel restrictions to try to contain the spread of the virus. The EU banned travelers from outside the bloc for over 30 days in an unprecedented move to seal its borders because of the corona virus crisis in March. In the US, the Trump administration has banned travelers from European airports from entering the US. Data from the flight and vessel tracking service Radar shows that the number of flights and vessels globally has drastically been reduced. Berti (2020)<sup>[7]</sup> stated that horrendous result of corona virus on shipping industry is as a result of its relationship with China. China is said to be the driver of the shipping industry, as a lot of countries around the world are dependent on Chinese demand and Chinese exports in respect to raw material and finished goods.

## **2.0 Accouterments on the Nigerian Maritime Industry**

Maritime transportation is one of the greatest modes of moving trade in quantum, around the world. It is economical and safer. It controls about 90% of the world economy. For example, the Nigerian federal government earlier planned, prior to COVID-19, to realize a revenue of N2trillion from the maritime industry. But, today this mission has been rendered impossible, due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a decline in the volume of import and export cargoes. In fact, all major ports of the world have been shut down and the global economy is now wallowing under economic convulsion.

Financial analysts, around the world, have earlier predicted that there would be a drop in government revenue from federal agencies: such as the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Standards Organization of Nigeria, the Nigerian Agency for Food Drug Administration and Control, Nigerian Agriculture Quarantine Services; just to mention a few. These agencies have the responsibilities of revenue generation by authorizing the release of cargoes in ports, (Hellenic shipping news, 2020) <sup>[8]</sup>. In fact, all maritime agencies are now being confronted with a decline in their revenue generation, as the pandemic continues to bite harder on the nations of the world: sea ports remain shut down (Hellenic shipping news, 2020) <sup>[9]</sup>. In Nigeria, these anomalies in port operations may lead to harder inflation, as cost of local production has started going up. The maritime sector, especially the seaports, remain the economic gate way of the nation.

There is great disruption in port operations, worldwide. Many nations have imposed restriction on port operation activities. This is making it difficult for stakeholders in the shipping industry to fulfill their contractual obligations. For example, in Nigeria, shortage is being noticed in the number of dock workers. This is as a result of the fear of contacting the disease. Although, the ports are not closed, but shortage of dockworkers have hindered effective and efficient port operations.

**3.0 The Result On Nigerian Maritime Workers:** Competent seafarers have always been distinct and well defined people, who have good direction-finding, course-plotting, with engineering skills According to Smith (2016) <sup>[10]</sup>, seafarers are always exploited, by their ship owners, despite being hard working. This COVID-19 pandemic has vividly brought out this exploitation. Most of them are now stranded, both on board and ashore. It is reported that they are not been paid strand benefits. Seafarers are in the high risk group of being exposed to COVID-19. It is much more likely for them to infect others. However, the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian seafarers are as follow:

**3.1 Marooned:** Beyond the tragic health hazards and human consequences of COVID-19 pandemic, the economic uncertainties, and disruptions, as aftermath, come at a significant cost to the global economy. Nigerian seafarers are not left behind the scene. The effects of the lockdowns were visible on them. Many countries of the world capitals and sea routes were put under strict lockdown. As a result, many Nigerian seafarers, right now, are still stranded, marooned, deserted, abandoned, isolated, stuck, forsaken, frustrated, left and put in difficult and helpless positions in most of these countries around the world. They are without any means of getting home, to unit with their families. Worse still, the ship-owners are not ready to give any kind of stranded benefits to them. In fact, there are, perhaps, no set of workers most isolated, in this pandemic than the maritime workers. Nations have been closing their borders and crew changes have been delayed for long periods, perhaps, indefinitely (Seafarers happiness index, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

**3.2 Deprivation of Mid Sea Reliever:** Since this pandemic lockdown, there had been no crew change at mid sea/ or reliever plan. Nothing is being done to let the crew members who have been aboard before the global shutdown, to proceed on their statutory leave or free gangway where sea ports are not shut down to allow the crew members who have gone ashore to return as relievers aboard. Owolabi and George (2020) <sup>[12]</sup> reported that Nigeria has shut international airports, closed all land borders and imposed curbs on cargo vessels allowed to dock at its ports, in an effort to contain the outbreak. Yet nobody has asked for

the about the whereabouts of these Nigerian seafarers on board those vessels denied passage. According to seafarers' happiness index (2020)<sup>[13]</sup> the trend for crew changes being delayed or postponed, meant that they are forced to serve beyond their normal contract period, and are now even being asked to renew their contracts to avoid censure.

**3.3 Cerebral and Psychosomatic Results:** Most of the maritime workers especially those on board ship are now in a state of fear and paranoid as they live and work onboard. They have to deal with strict compliance to safety precautionary measures against the virus. They have to live under constant fear of COVID-19 infection, coupled with their normal cargo operations. This has serious effect on their mental and psychological stability. The complexity of living and working onboard is unique and not comparable with working environment ashore (Oldenburg and Jensen, 2020)<sup>[14]</sup>. According to the seafarers, Happiness index (2020)<sup>[15]</sup> these seafarers suffer physical exhaustion, mental disturbance and felt home sick. Most Nigerian seafarers are also going through these precarious situations like their counterparts in other nations.

**3.4 Abandonment and denial of Social Support:** Like in other nations, the Nigerian seafarers experienced a high level of stress. Through which they become irritable, socially withdrawn and emotionally unstable. This consequently affect their mental health, as well as physical wellbeing. Thus, making it difficult for them to concentrate and solve problems. This is capable of exposing them to extreme anxiety, depression or severe emotional problem. These may include generalized anxiety disorder, phobias, panic disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Just like soldiers, they experience this traumatic event again and again. Social support systems from family members, friends and others, provide seafarers with emotional sustenance, tangible resources, required to counteract stress factors normally experienced in the performance of their duties. People with social support feel cared for and are valued by others. They feel a sense of belonging to a larger social network. But, with the advent of COVID-19 pandemic, the Nigerian seafarers become deprived of this social support, which are supposed to be of great impetus to their health. According to Auerbach and Gramling (2009)<sup>[16]</sup>, a large body of research has linked social support with good health and a superior ability to cope with stress.

**3.5 Dwindle in Immune Response:** from oral interactions with friends and colleagues on board, Since COVID-19 pandemic, have barely gone ashore to see their families and loved ones, and this we know that Ordinarily the immune system is a marvel of precision. It protects the body from disease by seeking out and destroying foreign invaders, such as viruses and bacteria. But there is substantial evidence that stress suppresses the activity of the immune system, leaving the seafarers as they become more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection, Saul McLeod (2010)<sup>[17]</sup>.

A study was conducted on board to measure stress levels among seafarers; revealed that their family accounted for 48%, pressure at work 30%, long working days 28%, heat in workplaces 24% of their stress factors. These are regarded as the most important sources of stress aboard a ship, Oldenburg and Jensen (2019)<sup>[18]</sup>.

**4.0 Measures Taken to Reduce Impacts of COVID-19:** Succinct steps have been taken by the various regulatory bodies in the maritime industry in Nigeria to contain the spread of the virus and on the other hand keeps the economy from a total crack-up. And as part of measures to curtail the impact on both onshore and offshore operations, a number of directives and regulations were issued by the government regulatory agencies as the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigerian Shippers Council (NSC), Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) to mention a few. We shall pin pointedly examine the measures taken by these regulatory bodies which directly or indirectly help alleviate the effect of the pandemic on maritime sector.

**4.1 Nigerian Port Authority (NPA):** Nigerian ports remain operational amidst the pandemic to aid the evacuation of essential items as food stuff, petroleum products, Drugs and medical paraphernalia and personal protective equipment to fight the pandemic. Shared acquiescence by port operators and stakeholders was installed by the Nigerian Ports Authority. Eromosele (2020) <sup>[19]</sup> detailed that Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) put on hold fees, as part of the measures initiated in reducing the effect of COVID-19. Nigerian Ports Authority in line with global best practices directed all terminal operators to defer all applicable terminal storage fees on consignments, to be exact, demurrage for an initial period of 21 days. This gesture was in cognizance of the pressure that COVID-19 pandemic inflicts on the economy.

**4.3 Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA):** In pursuance of reducing the effects of COVID-19 on the Nigerian maritime domain, certificates with expiry dates between March 1, 2020 and July 1, 2020 have been extended for a period of three months or until full resumption of NIMASA, whichever is earlier. However, the Master of any affected vessel will be required to attest to the satisfactory condition of the vessel. Specifically, in relation to STCW Certificates, Certificates of Safety Training and Certificates of Medical Fitness which are due to expire between March 1, 2020 and July 1, 2020 (both dates inclusive), such certificates are extended for a further three months' period commencing from the date reflected on the certificate. Ship owners are however required to have valid and subsisting insurance policies at all times. In addition to the foregoing, NIMASA issued a COVID-19 marine notice MN03/20/SN01 for the purpose of helping shipping companies and all maritime stakeholders to follow advice provided by the World Health Organization, International Maritime Organization, International Labor Organization and the Nigeria Center for Disease Control. The Healthcare Marine Notice contains several directives, relevant provisions relating to marine vessel operators engaged in offshore operations. Among others was the extension and the validity of Statutory and Trading certificates for all merchant vessels registered in Nigeria. These include Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping (STCW) certificates for seafarers issued by the Agency, safety certificates, certificates of medical fitness and other statutory and trading certificates related to SOLAS'74 as amended, MARPOL 73/78 as amended, National Requirements for Power Driven Small Crafts(PDSC), Certificates of ship registry and Maritime Labor Convention, 2006 as amended and will be applicable to all Nigerian flagged vessels and seafarers sailing onboard Nigerian flagged vessels as well as onboard foreign flagged vessels (Esenyel Partners, 2020) <sup>[20]</sup>. These measures were put in place to reduce the shock of COVID on national economy and allow easy operations of seafarers while the pandemic era last.

**4.4 Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR):** Sequence to measures to containing COVID-19 pandemic, a Circular No. DPR/1160/A/Vol.11/49, as a directive to oil and gas companies to reduce their workforce on offshore platforms as part of the measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Department of Petroleum Resources specifically directed that only staff who are engaged in essential duties should be nominated and permitted to travel to offshore/remote locations while non-essential staff currently at those locations should be withdrawn with immediate effect. Offshore staff are now required to work offshore for a minimum period of twenty-eight days and, intrinsically the rotation cycle of offshore personnel for less than twenty-eight days has been temporarily suspended. Crew men who are deployed on vessels and platforms are typically only those who are strictly necessary for their operations, cadets' understudies

assigned on vessels to gain requisite sea time and experience for purposes of obtaining shipping certifications were stopped and hope to be reinstated when the situation turn good and safe for all.

Department of Petroleum Resources issued another Circular, DPR/1160/A/Vol.11/53, basically to further addressed all oil and gas contractors'/service providers requiring them to ensure that they comply with government directives to limit the number of personnel on project/construction sites and observe specific directives on social distancing, curfew and lockdown as may be applicable, (DPR, 23, 30 March 2020) <sup>[21]</sup>.

**4.5 Nigerian Shippers Council:** Onyinye Nwachukwu (2020) <sup>[22]</sup> stated that Nigerian Shippers Council lamented how overtime cargoes have now taken up about 85 percent of Nigerian's ports spaces since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. The situation has not just created operational challenges at the Nigerian ports, but has also created a spillover in the seaside, extending ship turn-around time and cargoes dwell time and therefore pleaded with the ports land lord, operators and urged the importers to urgently clear their goods from the ports.

To address the challenge of freight forwarders moving to the ports under the lockdown in Lagos, NSC made available buses to convey agents to the ports for free from various locations in Lagos. engagement with working visits to several port terminal operators. Having observed non-compliance of some port service providers to these health safety guidelines amid the coronavirus pandemic, Shippers' Council assigned some officials to terminal operators and shipping companies to ensure safe port operations for handling essential services as directed by Presidency. The NSC officers assigned to the various shipping companies and terminals assist in ensuring that all safety and health regulations issued by the authorities are strictly adhered to curb the spread of the pandemic at the ports, (Hellenic shipping news, 2020) <sup>[23]</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

From the erstwhile, it could be caught a glimpse that COVID-19 has deeply traumatized the Nigerian shipping business and the world at large. There is no question that there will be a global economic slump and depression as an outcome of this pandemic, as it has affected every sector of the economy. Nevertheless, timely defeat of this virus and full overture and commencement of the economy by countries will help to speed up recovery from the economic slump occasioned by the pandemic. If the improved international and national maritime policies are vigorously pursued, it is believed that the welfare and rights of maritime workers, will greatly enhance productivity in shipping industry.

Notwithstanding that, Nigeria government has put in place some measures to reduce the consequences of COVID-19 on ports and port users through the regulatory agencies, much is yet to be done with respect to the strict compliance to the lay down directives, welfare of maritime workers especially those on essential assignment list. It must be put on record that the pandemic is still not making the condition of the mariners not adequately addressed. Consequence to this, will make worse the inherent communal abrasion, conflict and hostility associated with cosmopolitan nationality crews. Hence, a significant need to appreciate an initiation of a workable result-oriented mechanisms to enhance the interest of all maritime workers including those onboard ship, oil rig, supply platforms, offshore platforms such as Floating Production Storage (FPS) and Offloading (FPSO) vessels and Floating Storage and Offloading (FSO) vessels, to include safe crew changes and facilitate crew changes throughout this pandemic. By

this, it will ensure that seafarers are not being over used onboard. Such measures should make certain that seafarers on board are allowed to proceed on leave; while those ashore return.

Last of all, the health and welfare of maritime workers, with regard to the submission of realistic and hardheaded methodology on issues bordering on crew change, virtual, restock, and other legal responsibility brow by the 2019 coronavirus pandemic in relative to maritime workers should be given an insistent consideration.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

To the very best of my knowledge I, U.J. Okeleke (author) declare that there is no conflict of interest exist in this publication.

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