

COVID-19, Governments' Response and the Feminisation of Poverty: Ekiti State, Nigeria in Perspective

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Abstract: *This article examined the effects of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19), and governments' response action on female poverty in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Discourse on female poverty abounds, but there is the need to revisit the topic, particularly in the light of*

a global pandemic. In achieving its objective, the qualitative research approach was adopted. The method combined the use of primary data elicited through the conduct of Key informants Interview (KII), and the review of secondary materials to generate data. Ekiti State, as the focus of this study, was purposively selected, while Ekiti Central Senatorial District was conveniently selected from the three Senatorial Districts being the seat of commerce of the State. Three towns from three Local Government Areas under Ekiti Central: Adebayo, (Ado Ekiti); Aramoko (Ekiti West); and Ipoti (Ijero) were randomly selected. A total of seven women, including traders/artisans who are breadwinners of their respective families, were interviewed. Responses were analysed thematically and with the use of the descriptive method. It was found-out that governments' lockdown measure had a negative effect on commercial activities, as those activities were restricted; an action which had a multiplier effect on female/household poverty. Despite the punitive measures attached to the disobedience of the lockdown order, many women still engaged in 'illicit' commercial activities, as a desperate move to feed their respective families. Besides, the palliative provided by the government to cushion the effect of the lockdown was limited to grossly inadequate food items. The paper recommends that government should put in place, as a matter of urgency, a social security scheme such as an emergency fund that would adequately cater for women in the informal sector, and the poorest of them.

Key words: COVID-19; Governments' response; Feminisation of poverty.

Introduction

Many works, including Arriagada (2003), Oyediran and Odusola (2004), MacKenzie (2019), Kazeem (2019), among others, have been done to explain the trajectory, causes and consequences of female poverty. Similar endeavours, including Idowu and Adefisoye (2019) also abound on the topic with respect to Nigeria and Ekiti State. However, there is the need to revisit the issue, particularly in the light of the outbreak of a major global pandemic -COVID-19, which has had devastating effects on global economy, as well as the economies of nations, families and individuals. The implication of such hapless development on female poverty appears grave, as women represent the world most deprived and the most vulnerable group (MacKenzie, 2019; The World's Women, 2015).

Traditionally, women assume roles of child-bearers, care-givers, and are meant to see to the effective running of their family. However, present-day realities have entrenched in them more roles and responsibilities. Moser (1993) stated that "present-day women are saddled with roles which she described in three folds: reproductive role (childbearing and rearing); productive role (economic engagement outside the home); and community management role (ensuring the effective running of the community)" Increasingly, women have engaged more in economic engagement to provide support for their spouses and

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also to meet the ever-increasing financial needs of their families. Oyediran and Odusola (2004) observed that women, in a bid to lessen the effect of poverty and as well support men's income generation power have been forced to both the formal and informal labour market sometime to the detriment of the family. These have made women's contribution to the needs of their family and the nation at large unquantifiable (Idowu and Adefisoye, 2019).

For Nigeria, the country was ranked in June 2018 as the highest among countries with extreme poverty (Kazeem, 2018). According to the report by the World Data Lab's Poverty Clock, the country had 86.9 million people living below the poverty line of earning \$2 per day (Muhammad, 2019). Among this increasing rate of poverty in Nigeria, women are the majority due to traditions, cultural norms and values, their lack of access to and control over resources and the relation of power between men and women (The World's Women, 2015). Akinwale (2019) concluded that about 69% of Nigerians live below the poverty line of \$2 (2 dollars) per day according to a study carried out by Oxfam Abuja, an International Organisation. However, out of this 69% Nigerians living in poverty, Adepaju (2001) believed that 70% are women. This is premised upon the apparent gender inequality faced by women, and the roles that socialisation have placed on them, which prevents them from fully engaging in productive economic activities.

Ekiti State Nigeria is a State in the South West region of the country. The State is seen as the poorest in the region, and the second poorest in Nigeria based on internally generated revenue, and the low allocation it gets from the federation account (Ekiti State Government, 2012). Besides this, the State depends majorly on the civil service, with few industries and companies in existence; leaving the State with few choices of employment. Women in Ekiti State are either engaged in petty trading or service rendering activities like tailoring, and hairdressing among others for a living. This made the people of the State to depend largely on salary payment of civil servants (Ekiti State Government, 2012). The foregoing makes a mass of Ekiti women to be involved in farming and other vocations.

Consequent upon government measures to curtail the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly to lockdown the economy, appears to have spelt untold hardship on an already vulnerable group in the State. Besides, it was widely reported that despite lockdown rules and the high-handedness of government aides and Taskforce officials saddled with the responsibility of enforcing lockdown rules; many women-traders still defied the rules to display their wares (Ogunjobi, 2020). This, although unlawful, it attested to the desperation of many women, many of which are widows and breadwinners of their families, to make money, against government orders. Particularly, as the palliatives provided by government were grossly inadequate.

This work, therefore, concerns itself with the task of examining the effect(s) of government's lockdown measure informed by the outbreak of the Corona Virus pandemic on female poverty in Ekiti State, South West, Nigeria. The researchers follow a distinct path to interrogate and demonstrate how governments' actions, particularly during emergencies, could impact women positively or negatively. This work is divided into six parts. The introduction is followed by theoretical approaches to female poverty, while the third part reviews conceptual and empirical literature. The fourth part presents data, while the fifth discusses the findings. The last section concludes and made recommendations.

Research Questions and Objectives

In order to respond to the issue raised in this study, the following research questions and objectives were made to pilot the study;

- i. What are the effects of the Corona Virus pandemic on female poverty?
- ii. How did governments' response to COVID-19 impact female poverty in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

The objectives of this work are, therefore, to;

- i. examine the effects of the Corona Virus pandemic on female poverty; and
- ii. Investigate how governments' response to COVID-19 impacted female poverty in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

Theoretical Approaches

The attempt to situate poverty within the contexts of definitional and theoretical perspectives often conjures a fascinating debate among scholars from various disciplines and endeavours. This is as a result of the nebulous nature of the word 'poverty'. In spite of such ambivalence, an attempt shall be made to synthesise those divergent, but complementary perspectives and views. The various approaches include, but not limited to, the monetary approach, social exclusion approach, participatory approach, social capital approach, geographical approach and the capability approach. The work of Ruggeri, Saith and Stewart (2003) is commonly linked with this classification, although, other scholars have made valuable contributions to such classification.

The monetary approach conceived poverty as "a decline in consumption or income and is premised on a poverty line (Desarrollo, 2004). The United Nations' benchmark on poverty is often used to measure poverty in terms of income. Although such benchmark has varied with time, the argument is that poverty is measured by daily income. This approach is narrow as it focuses on income as the single variable/benchmark for measuring poverty, thereby neglecting other indicators. On the other hand, the social exclusion approach views poverty through the lenses of the structural characteristics that "engender processes and dynamics that exclude individuals or groups from full social participation" (Desarrollo, 2004). It thus made a case for the promotion of inclusion and equal access to labour and social opportunities. It must be added that inequality and social exclusion have been identified as prominent factors responsible for women's involvement in terrorism and other social vices (Adefisoye and Adedokun, 2018). This approach appears hanging as it made little effort in suggesting practical means for engendering the social inclusion of women in major spheres of the society.

The third approach, which is the participatory approach, complements the social exclusion approach, as it tries to make up for its flaws. The participatory approach argues that equal and open participation in social-economic and political issues is central to poverty eradication, and it is the cause of poverty. Ruggeri, Saith and Stewart (2003), and Arriagada (2003) have opined that "poverty alleviation entails empowering the poor" It is important to note that the point of convergence of these approaches is that poverty is viewed through the

lenses of material and tangible possessions. However, evidence from the Third world, particularly Nigeria, have shown that women empowerment programmes and the scheme will not automatically translate into material wealth.

The fourth approach - the social capital, views poverty from a different angle. In general terms, social capital is defined as “an intangible resource that enables or prepares individuals or groups to obtain benefits through their social relations” (Miranda, 2003). This approach highlights other, less visible dimensions of poverty, that is, the existence of “a number of variables that are not easy to measure in monetary terms and which have a strong influence on the condition of poverty” (Desarrollo, 2004). These variables are associated with the psycho-social components of poverty (Miranda, 2003). The claim that certain variables, which are responsible, cannot be easily measured is the major limitation of this approach.

The next approach - geographical approach, views poverty from a spatial context. According to Desarrollo (2004), the approach “contributed to a better understanding of poverty by studying the features of the spatial context in which the poor reside and by taking into account such aspects as a concentration of and access to natural and physical assets”. This approach “reflects the heterogeneity of the phenomenon and pin-points the population’s needs” (Desarrollo, 2004). Importantly, by studying spatial components to determine poverty causes is limiting. From the angle of freedom, the capacity approach, pioneered by Amartya Sen, poverty is interpreted as a lack of resources impeding people from engaging in certain basic activities such as staying alive and enjoying a long and healthy life, reproducing and transmitting their culture to future generations, interacting socially, having access to knowledge and enjoying the freedom of expression and thought” (Desarrollo, 2004). The fight against poverty is, therefore seen as consisting of identifying and increasing people’s capacities to improve their wellbeing” (Desarrollo, 2004). This approach is ambiguous, as it encapsulates elements of the previously discussed approaches. However, the term ‘freedom’ is relative as it has different meanings and scope across societal contents.

The foregoing has justified the assertion that defining poverty often conjures definitional and theoretical pluralism. Nevertheless, the outlined approaches provide valid underpinning and underscore the causes of female poverty in Nigeria, and in particular, Ekiti State. It is important to note that female poverty in Ekiti State is evident in monetary and material wealth; and is caused by a lack of equal opportunities, unequal poor relations, and lopsidedness in wealth distribution. Geographically, this inequality is evident in the absence of equal opportunities for rural and urban dwellers; a situation that had encouraged rural-urban drift (Omodan, Tsotetsi & Dube, 2019).

Conceptual and Empirical Review of Literature

Poverty

Poverty is a relative term that is best described based on perception. It is a major problem that has affected the nationals of every country in the world. It has many facets and causes. Poverty is often defined absolutely on the economic term as the inability to earn above \$2 (2 Dollars) a day

(Kenton, 2020). Poverty, however, goes beyond this, it is an inability to feed, have decent shelter, seek medical attention, seek education and earn a decent living (Compassion, 2020). Examining this definition, poverty deals majorly with the standard of living of individuals and the ability to provide basic needs. Chen (2019) corroborated this and stated that poverty is a situation where persons can't afford the financial resources that can provide the resources to live above the minimum standard of living. Poverty affects every country in the world but with different temerity and severances. More elaborately, the United Nations (2020) describes poverty as a multi-dimension phenomenal that entails more than lack of income. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making (UN, 2020).

Feminisation of Poverty

According to Veeran (2000), the term "feminisation of poverty" was first used by Diana Pearce in 1976 based on her perception of women in America having an increasingly large number being economically disadvantaged. The feminisation of poverty looks into the differential effect of poverty on women and men. Moghadam (2005) opined that women suffer more in poverty majorly due to gender inequality, and requested that poverty reduction programs should put this in perspective. MacKenzie (2019) defined feminisation of poverty as "the phenomenon that women and children are disproportionately represented among the world's poor compared to men". In the same view, Anyanwu (2010) posited that the term 'feminisation of poverty' is used to describe a situation where poverty is prevalent among female-headed household that the male-headed households due to discrimination in the labour market. Majorly as a consequence of low educational qualifications as compared to their male counterpart, which will, in turn, result in wage discrimination.

Women's Budget Group (2018) believed that poverty has a gender face, and has different causes and consequences on women and men. Moghadam (2005), in the same line, opined the women's poverty could be largely attributed to these three factors, viz: the expansion of female-headed households, the persistence of inequality in the home against women and the world economic policies. The continuous increase in female-headed households can be attributed majorly to death of spouse, divorce or separation, the birth of children outside wedlock or families where the wife is the breadwinner due to the husband's inability or unwillingness to secure a paid job. These set of women are believed to rank highest among the poor as they hardly have reliable sources of livelihood (Moghadam, 2005).

Likewise, inequalities faced by women within the household have affected their access to and control over resources (for example, land, loan, education). The World's Women (2015) opined that investing in women as an economic entity by giving them access and control over resources as citizens will prove as an effective tool for fighting poverty in women. Not limited to these, another contributor to women's poverty according to The World's Women (2015) is that women and girls are often saddled with household responsibilities which always go unpaid for

thereby limiting them from engaging in productive income-generating activities. More women are in the informal sector while even the ones employed in the formal sector have their majority at the lower cadre. Adepoju (2001) submitted that poverty has a greater effect on women than men majorly because of the gender roles placed on their shoulders. Likewise, the recent recession that hit the economy, job loss, and the deteriorating economy are placing greater responsibilities on women to engage in income-generating activities (Adepoju, 2001).

Chant (2003) also attributed women's poverty to three major factors which are marginalisation with respect to the lack of access to entitlements, exposure to heavy work burdens that yield low income and cultural, legal and labour market barriers. Women poverty is also further driven by gender-neutral policies and procedures introduced by the government to tackle poverty at large. Interventions are often directed at households where the men are the breadwinner with the women being dependent (The World's Women, 2015). To corroborate Chant (2003), Abubakar (2019) described women poverty as one that cuts across every facet of life (education, food security, health, industry and politics) and further expressed the inequality women face particularly in employment as a major cause of poverty. However, the Coalition for Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality (2020) submitted that "While men make up the majority of those who have died from the virus, women and girls bear the brunt of disproportionate care burdens, disruptions in income and education, poor access to health and other essential services".

Contrarily, Quisumbing, Haddad and Pena (2001) opined that although it is widely believed that there are more women living below the poverty line, there are no statistics to support this fact. Quisumbing, Haddad and Pena (2001) argued that "there are more female in poor male-headed households compared to the proportion of female-headed households among poor households". Quisumbing, Haddad and Pena (2001) further submitted that female-headed households represent a small proportion of the overall poor, therefore, cannot be used as a yardstick for measuring women poverty.

Factors Responsible for Female Poverty

Poverty is a global phenomenon that has differential effects on men and women. It has been established that women suffer the incidence of poverty more than their male counterpart because of the pre-existing gender inequalities faced by them. Poverty in itself is multi-causal in nature; talk more of female poverty, which also has its causative factors. Some of the causes of poverty among women are cultural norms, low level of education, inability to secure employment, warfare, lack of infrastructures, lack of access to basic necessities and family instability among others.

Firstly, cultural and social norms promote gender inequality which is a major driver of poverty. Cultural norms promote male dominance, which often denies women's access to and control over economic resources. These often play out in inheritance sharing, access to loans and even sometimes land acquisition (The World's Women, 2015; United Nations, 2012). Likewise, women, especially rural women, hardly have decision making power even when such a decision affects them directly (Leading University, Sylhet, 2012). Secondly, lack of gainful

employment is another major cause of poverty in women. It has been noted that a good job brings good income which is expected to lift an individual or family out of poverty. However, it is no more news that unemployment is one major problem that developing countries face. Women are exposed to a higher degree of unemployment, as they are sometimes denied employment opportunities based on their expected biological role (childbearing). Even when employed, they are found more in the informal sector and the lower part of the ladder in the formal sector (e.g. secretaries, typist, cleaners and messengers, among others). This has exposed women to extreme poverty, where thereby finding it difficult to meet their daily needs. (Soken-Huberty, n.d; United Nations, 2012; Concern, 2020).

Thirdly, lack of education fosters the hold of poverty on individuals. Poverty is a cycle in which education can break. Although it is not all the uneducated that are poor, they, however, represent a fair share among the poor. Women's lack of access to quality education is a factor that has kept them in the vicious cycle of poverty. Education is known to open up doors of opportunities that will give people chances of survival. Many girls (particularly in the rural areas) drop out of school sometimes due to pregnancy, early marriage or financial incapability and often find it difficult to continue compared to their male counterpart this has kept the female folk backwards in acquiring quality education (Soken-Huberty, n.d; Compassion, 2020; Concern, 2020).

Fourthly, Conflicts, wars and social unrest have pushed many into unexpected poverty. Wars have grounded thriving economic activities, causing many to leave their sources of livelihood in a bid to survive, loss of a breadwinner, destruction of infrastructures to death during the conflict (Soken-Huberty, n.d; Concern, 2020). Another major cause of poverty is lack of infrastructure. Infrastructure has been known to drive investment which will in-turn drive job creation and lead to a reduction in poverty. However, where this is lacking, poverty is imminent. Lack of access to basic necessities of life like food, shelter, healthcare and water often lead to poverty. Time spent in search of these need where they are not readily available can be spent pursuing things that have more economic value. Likewise, the inability to access good food, clean water and affordable shelter can result in poor health which will further strengthen the hold of poverty (Concern, 2020). Finally, Instability in the family cycle like divorce, separation, death of spouse have plunged women into poverty. Breakdown in a formerly stable family often results in poverty, especially where children are involved.

Chronology of the Corona Virus Pandemic and Governments' Response in Nigeria and Ekiti State

The novel Coronavirus disease first broke out in Wuhan City of China in the late 2019, which earned the virus, the named COVID-19. It is a viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome, which is highly transmittable. Coronavirus is not alien to the human race, as China recorded as a type of Coronavirus in 2003 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) while Saudi Arabia in 2012, barely ten years later recorded another type, which was referred to as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (Global Health Now, 2020). The disease is highly transmittable from person to person through close contact with droplets

that could be airborne from an infected person (Kumar, Malviya & Sharma, 2020). COVID-19 had since its discovery spread through the world infecting thousands of people, leading to the death of many and grounding the world economies (Shereen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir & Siddique, 2020). In containing the spread of the virus, many countries had to shut down its economy, close borders, close schools and prevent movement of a person from one place to the other.

Nigeria recorded her first case of Coronavirus on February 27, 2020, through an Italian expatriate who worked in Nigeria and returned from his country to Lagos, Nigeria, with the second case being someone who had contact with him. Both the index case and the second case were duly taken to isolation centres where they were treated. The third case was a Nigerian returnee from the United Kingdom who tested positive to the virus on March 17, 2020. The virus has since had continuous spread in Nigeria through contact with infected persons and travellers from high-risk countries, reaching over eight thousand infected persons as on May 25, 2020 (Shaban, 2020).

Ekiti State in the South-West geo-political zone of Nigeria had her first index case on March 18, 2020, through an American returnee who in turn infected his driver (Toromade, 2020). The government of many states in the federation then ordered the use of hand sanitiser and encouraged hand washing in the public places. Several State Governments, on the March 20, ordered the closure of all schools (from primary to tertiary), which Ekiti State also embarked upon, this, however, could not deter the spread of the virus. The closure of schools was preceded by the abrupt end of the mandatory 21 days National Youth Service Corps orientation camp on March 18, 2020 (Awojulugbe, 2020). As a continuous measure, Ekiti State due to her inability to accommodate massive outbreak of the virus, on March 29, 2020, announced a lockdown on economic activities and closure of her borders against interstate and intrastate travels with the exemption of essential workers and food suppliers (Eromosele, 2020). Ani (2020) explained that the lockdown was meant to ensure that the people of Ekiti abide by the stay-at-home policy of the State. These resulted into the closure of offices (both private and Government-owned) and lock up of shops and markets for two weeks with effect from March 31 to April 13, 2020, which was later extended. The governor, to ensure compliance, set up a COVID-19 Response Taskforce.

Ekiti state government in its broadcast to announce the lockdown promised the opening of the State's food bank as a way of providing food palliatives to the residents of the State to cushion the effect of the lockdown. The distribution of the food palliative kicked off on April 6, 2020, in the State capital and was later moved to other local governments (Oke, 2020; Ashube, 2020). The governor on April 22 announced that the palliative is meant for the vulnerable in the society.

Needless to say that the lockdown affected the business and income-generating abilities of men and women alike, but it had more effect on the female sex because they are more concentrated in the informal sector of the economy. They depended on daily income from goods sold to feed their family, especially when they are in female-headed households. Even the few in the formal sector hardly fared better, as outstanding salaries were not paid, coupled with an increase in food consumption by children in the course of the holiday. As if adding salt to injury, a few women who could not but bring out their ware for sale to ensure the provision of necessities for their household had their wares

destroyed and burnt for defying the Ekiti State lockdown orders (Ogunjobi, 2020). These further compounded the woes of the affected traders as some were beaten as they made attempts to salvage the confiscated or destroyed items. The lockdown, which had prevented many from carrying out their day to day business activities, has exposed women to a greater degree of marginalisation because many are losing their means of livelihood. This, though, was corroborated by the United Nations (2020), who stated that the pandemic would result in women experiencing an increase in the pre-existing inequalities they face in every sector of life.

Methodology

Study Area

Ekiti State was purposively chosen as the study area, due to the prevalence of poverty in State. Ekiti State is one of the six states in the South-west geo-political zone of Nigeria. The State is predominantly known for its farming and agricultural activities and most importantly for its famous recognition of having a good number of well-read persons. This earned them the slogan Ekiti; the fountain of knowledge. According to the 2006 census figure, Ekiti State has a population of 2,384,212 people (Ekiti State Government). The State is divided into three Senatorial Districts: Ekiti Central, Ekiti North and Ekiti South. From the three senatorial districts in the State: Ekiti Central, Ekiti North and Ekiti south. Ekiti Central comprising the State Capital, Ado-Ekiti, Irepodun/Ifelodun/ Ekiti west, Ijero and Efon Local Government Areas was randomly selected. Ekiti Central is also the most populated of the three senatorial districts. Furthermore, three of the five LGAs that make up the Ekiti central senatorial district were randomly selected for the conduct of Key Informants Interview.

Instruments and Data Analysis

Two Key Informant Interviews were conducted in Ipoti Ekiti under Ijero LGA with two women who were artisans and farmers and doubled as the breadwinners of their respective families. Likewise in Ado-Ekiti, KII was conducted with 5 five artisans/traders at a popular road-side market in Ado-Ekiti; while KII was conducted with the *Olori*(Queen) of Aramoko-Ekiti under Ekiti West LGA. The *Olori* doubled as Secretary of Olori-in-council in Ekiti State. Data obtained through the conduct of KII/IDI were presented using the thematic method, and with the use of the descriptive method of data analysis.

Presentation of Data and Discussion of findings

A two-in-one question directly drawn from the objectives of the research was asked each of the interviewees. Specifically, the interviewees were asked to narrate their experiences during the period of government's lockdown measure, and the action impacted their means of livelihood/income.

Responding to the question(s), a tailor at Ipoti Ekiti under Ijero LGA expressed that:

This COVID-19 lockdown has affected a lot of things. As you can see, people have not been bringing clothes for sewing. Even the ones I collected before

the lockdown, initially, I couldn't sew until I carried one of my sewing machines to the house. I have finished clothes, but their owners can't collect them. The few that have collected promised to pay me to balance later, which I don't know when. The situation is frustrating! (Interview with a tailor, at Ipoti Ekiti, May 5, 2020)

In a similar manner, the second respondent at Ipoti lamented that:

This no-movement has affected me. I can't sell my goods, the few ones I have been able to sell; we used the money to eat. I don't even know what will happen after these because presently I don't have money to replace the goods. But we must eat –now (Interview with a soft drink retailer, at Ipoti Ekiti, May 5, 2020).

At Ado Ekiti, the centre for commerce and seat of power of Ekiti State, the impact of government's lockdown measure to contain the spread of COVID-19 was more felt. Lamenting the impact of the lockdown measures on her and household, a young widow who doubled as a tailor and hairdresser expressed that:

The situation is dicey and hopeless at the moment! I am a tailor and hairdresser, also a widowed mother of two. Even when sales were regular, we could hardly feed conveniently because of school fees. Now the few clothes I have sewn have not been collected because the customers don't have enough to collect them. I can count the number of people that have made their hair in the space of almost 2 months that the pandemic/lockdown stated. One of my children is preparing to enter the university, and I was gradually saving towards that, now we are feeding on the money. It was my turn to collect contributions last month, but people did not pay. It has a lot of negative impacts but we thank God for life (Interview with a widowed Tailor/Hairdresser in Ado Ekiti, May 7, 2020).

A trader at the popular Mojere Market, along Adebayo, Ado Ekiti decried the impact of the lockdown measure of government by expressing that:

I have been coming to the market almost every day despite the restriction on movement and open trading. Sometimes the taskforce chases us, we run and come back again because we must eat. But sales are not like before. Since there is no movement, many people are not receiving salaries and wages; they are also managing what they have or finding alternatives. Besides, the price of pepper has tripled. What we buy for N7000/basket is now between N16000 and N17000 now. How are we going to sell it? Even we are finding it difficult to feed because the profit is not coming. Sometimes we run at a loss when we can't sell as fast as before, and you know this thing is perishable. I just pray we get over this soon. (Interview with pepper seller in Ado-EKiti, May 7, 2020).

In the same manner, dried fish seller who also sells second-hand clothes in Ado Ekiti lamented that:

I used to have my stall at the Bisi market where I sell my wares before the pandemic. Now the market is under lock-up, thank God I was able to

take out my dried fish; else everything would have gotten spoilt. I was selling only fish but when it wasn't enough to meet the needs of the family; I added fairly used clothes to it. After the first lockdown, I started moving from house to house but it wasn't the same. The problem is we are also eating from the proceeds that are not enough to re-stock not to talk of getting profit. The Covid-19 lockdown has really affected my business (Interview with a dried fish/fairly used clothes seller in Ado-Ekiti, May 7, 2020)

It is important to note that Bisi Market is one of the two major markets in Ado Ekti. Due to its size, the government announced its closure alongside *Oja Oba* market as part of measure to contain the spread of COVID-19 through a large crowd. Responding to the interview questions, a pepper grinder at the Mojere market narrated that:

Before the lockdown, I do come to the market every day except on Sundays, and at least, I make up to N4000 sales daily out of which I maintain the engine and take care of the home. Of recent, I only come to the market on days that the lockdown is relaxed. And anytime I come, I spend up to N1000 as transport (exclusive of food o). Bikes are now very expensive and they are not allowed to carry 2 passengers. At the end of the day, it will almost come to a loss. My husband also works with somebody as a driver. Since the lockdown began, his boss has been at home so he too has not been going to work. His boss was even nice to pay him half of his salary last month, which I'm not sure he will do again this month. i just pray this pandemic ends soon, so that life can resume as usual and even better. Presently, I have a lot of worries! I have 2 children in higher institutions, how do we cater for them when school resumes (Interview with a Grinder at Mojere Market, Ado-Ekiti, May 7, 2020).

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that informants mostly are not solely responsible for the upkeep of their individual families. Also, the lockdown measure put in place by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic caused hardship on the families of the respondents. Besides, it also affected their businesses and means of livelihood.

In her explanation, the Queen of Aramoko Kingdom, and the Secretary of the Olori-in-Council of Ekiti state, Olori Adeyemi opined that the lockdown measure of government would further entrench female poverty in the State. He stressed that:

This (pandemic/lockdown measure) will result in more poverty, particularly for women. Many women depend on their daily income to feed their families. Some are the breadwinners of their families, even when their husbands are working; these women work to support their family income. Now people are at home, and their children are also forced on holiday, leading to an increase in food consumption. They are spending money they have earlier saved without commensurate income. Organisations are even retrenching; how will our women cope with their children? (Interview with Olori of Aramoko Ekiti, May 5, 2020).

The foregoing has given valuable insight into the objectives of this research. Thematically, the effects of government's lockdown had a direct implication of household poverty and wellbeing. As identified in the literature, the outbreak of war, violent conflict and natural disasters, including health emergencies and pandemic are proven factors that can negatively impact and in most cases, entrench female poverty. Other studies like Shepherd, Mitchell, Lewis, Lenhardt, Jones, Scott and Muir-Wood (2013); and OXFAM (2013) explain that hazards of every sort can cancel years of consistent efforts and progress on poverty reduction and distort national economic growth.

With respect to the Covid-19 pandemic, one of the governments' measures to contain the spread of the murderous virus was to lockdown the economy; restrict large gatherings including commercial activities, and the maintenance of social/physical distance. In particular, the Ekiti State government declared a two-week total lockdown with the exemption of essential service-providers. Commercial activities were also restricted to very few secluded places. Furthermore, during the second phase of the lockdown, movement and commercial activities were restricted to two days in the week (Tuesday and Thursday) while trading activities were permitted to take place in designated open markets. The third and fourth phase of the lockdown, movement and commercial activities were further eased to three-days-a-week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) between the hours of 7am to 2pm (VOA News, 2020).

The implication of these measures is that people had very few hours to trade and make money while the cost of other services, including transportation was continuously on the increase. This corroborates the findings of Concern (2020) and Coalition for Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality (2020) which argued that "poverty is caused by wars, violent conflict social unrest, including pandemics. Besides wars and violent conflict, lack of freedom is another identified cause of female poverty. In his capacity approach, Amartya Sen identified poverty "as a lack of resources impeding people from engaging in certain basic activities such as staying alive and enjoying a long and healthy life, reproducing and transmitting their culture to future generations, interacting socially, having access to knowledge and enjoying the freedom of expression and thought" (Sen, 1999; Desarrollo, 2004). The fight against poverty is also seen as consisting of identifying and increasing people's capacities to improve their wellbeing" (Desarrollo, 2004). However, government's lockdown measures prevented people; especially women who were involved in commercial activities to go about their normal business in order to improve their welfare, and those of their families. Ironically, there were no social security measures put in place to cushion the effects of such measure, except the provision of palliatives in the form of food items, which were grossly inadequate and to a large extent not available to every household.

The foregoing corroborates the tenets of the monetary, social inclusion and participatory approaches to female poverty. It is important to emphasise that the monetary approach, for instance, conceives poverty as "a decline in consumption or income (Desarrollo, 2004); while the social exclusion approach made a case for the promotion of inclusion and equal access to labour and social opportunities. Importantly, the participatory approach argues that equal and open participation in social-economic and political issues is central to poverty eradication. The centrality of these approaches is that socio-economic and political restrictions are

major causes of poverty. This work validates this assertion, as government lockdown measures restricted women from taking active parts in economic activities, which consequently affected their incomes, and entrenched poverty. However, the impact would have been cushioned if the government had put in place adequate measures in terms welfare packages, including food and other social security schemes for women during the lockdown.

Conclusion

This work has examined the effects of the Corona Virus pandemic and government response on female poverty in Ekiti State, South West, Nigeria. It explained that government's lockdown measure that was put in place to contain the spread of the murderous virus had a negative effect on female poverty in Ekiti state; as a good number of women are involved in commercial activities and doubled as mothers and breadwinners in their respective families. The desperation to sustain their families pushed many women to defile governments' lockdown measures to display their wares and risked the punitive actions attached to such defiance. Unfortunately, the government did little to cushion the effects of such measure; not only provided palliatives in the form of food to limited households in the State. Thus, it is, therefore, important, to recommend that effect of the lockdown should be cushioned by providing incentives in terms of loans and tax/levy-waiver to women, particularly those who are below the poverty line, and those of the informal sector.

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