

Assessment of the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Small and Medium Scale Business Enterprises: Nigerian Youths in Perspective

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Abstract: This study is designed to assess the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium scale business enterprises' sustainability, with focus on Nigerian youths. Three research questions were raised and a null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. The survey inferential research design was adopted, the study population are the Nigerian youths engaged in small and medium scale business enterprises across the 36 states of Nigeria. Using the multistage random sampling and accidental/purposeful techniques, a sample of 6000 respondents were selected for the study. The researchers designed structured questionnaire divided into three sections to cover the three questions raised was used for data collection. The administration of the instrument was done within eight weeks. Data was analyzed using simple percentage and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis to test the null hypothesis. The result shows that 25 small and medium scale business enterprises were categorized and used for the study, out of the 6000 respondents used for the study, 3791 respondents (63.2%) were males, while 2209 (36.8%) were female entrepreneurs. The result further identified 14 ways the COVID-19 pandemic affected the socioeconomic activities of small and medium scale business enterprises among the youths. The result of the correlation analysis yielded a calculated r-value of 0.688 and a table value of 0.176 at 0.05 significance level and a degree of freedom of 5998, indicating that COVID-19 pandemic has significant effects on SMEs' sustainability in Nigeria. Based on this, it was concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused very severe significant effects on small and medium scale business enterprises, the major players in this sector are the youths, hence COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a devastating effect on SMEs. It is therefore recommended among others that there should be the strict observation of all preventive -control protocols as prescribed by the agencies concerned in Nigeria and world over. It was further recommended that government and other agencies can make palliative capitals as soft loans for those whose businesses were badly affected to start all over again or continue from where they stopped.

Keywords: Socioeconomic Impacts, Small and Medium Scale Business Enterprises, COVID-19 Pandemic, Nigerian Youths and Entrepreneurial Skills

1. Introduction

The youths are the major fulcrum of any nation's development imperatives, this is so because they constitute over 65% of the major work force of every nation globally.

As has been variously posited in various fora, the Nigerian youths in particular and most African youths are highly entrepreneurial and had contributed their quota to national

development and the economic growth of their respective countries, so they are not lazy as portrayed by the global west [22, 1, 6]. Like in other climes, the youths are among the most progressives of those communities [31]. Nigerian youths are economically viable and do not believe in the syndrome of necessarily waiting for their parents or government to provide for them before they can feed or survive. Nigerian youths have high taste for modern living conditions, to achieve this, they engage in all forms of legal means of livelihoods for their survival [28, 1]. Most Nigerian youths are engaged in small and medium scale business enterprises, ranging from sales and servicing of automobile parts, construction and fabrication of parts, artisans, provision of basic social and artisanal services like masonry, plumbing, electrical fittings and transportation, sachet and bottled water production, baking, confectionary, sewing and fashion design, teaching, agriculture, crop and animal production. Others also engage in the cultivation and sales of ornamental plants, information and communication technology (ICT), warehousing and distribution of some goods, services and commodities among others. Others engage in market horticultural productivities, while others sale all form of goods in the open markets [1, 26].

The coming of Corona virus, which has been code named COVID-19 virus (Corona Virus Disease, 2019) has come with a devastating effect, which the world globally was not prepared for. The pandemic rendered some unimaginable effects, ranging from the deaths of humans to disruption of economic and social activities and the final collapse of the economy and national growth, which has taken a serious down turn on the socio-economic well-being of the nations of the world [18].

The corona virus disease (COVID-19) is a disease situation caused by a new strain of coronavirus that has never been established to live in human before. The virus is caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-Cov-2). The COVID-19 pandemic broke out in Wuhan province in China and was reported on the 31st day of December, 2019 by World Health Organization, [10]. The coronavirus disease begins with some mild symptoms ranging from unnoticed illness, to pneumonia, fever, cough, sore throat, headache, breathing difficulty, leading to clotting of blood flow and eventual death [10].

Most observations made by researchers have shown that the disease is communicable [8, 5, 14, 18, 4]. These authors posited that like SARS and other related diseases, the corona virus is a communicable disease, which can be transmitted from one person to another through touch, body fluids and personal contact. Some researchers further described the coronavirus disease as a droplet infection [18, 4]. Body fluid like mucus, cough, blood, sweat and spittle had been identified as a major point of transmission, personal body contact and breathing were also identified as possible point of transmission of the coronavirus disease [10].

A lot of studies have shown that there are no specific treatments for COVID-19 virus, however, some scholars have observed that the treatment of the symptoms have

proven to be very effective as the world is still grappling with the efforts to bring a comprehensive treatment to the pandemic [16, 8, 2, 4, 29]. Some studies found that treatment of corona virus disease can be done most effectively based on patient's clinical conditions [17, 10].

The coming of this pandemic since it was so sudden with no adequate preparation put in place before the pandemic became full blown, took a very serious toll on the society and their economic activities. This was orchestrated because of the preventive measures adopted by most government of the world to curtail the devastating effects the pandemic had on human lives and wellbeing. Humans died in their leaps and bounds; most businesses were folded because of the restriction order of government to prevent personal contacts and association, thereby, leading to the spread of the virus. Even at this, people still died in most parts of the world. Government restrictions on social distancing, curfew, closure of public places, shopping malls, markets, shops, churches, schools, train stations, airports, public transport parks among others were all close down as a safety measure to curtail the spread of the virus [25, 27].

COVID-19 and small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria.

Various studies have been carried out and reported by the United Nations (2015) and cited by [13] that unemployment is a recurrent global challenge in this 21st century. The World Bank also reported that youth unemployment globally and particularly Nigeria, records about 78 percent, which is about over a hundred million Nigerians in the country [10]. Another study reported that there are many youths roaming about Nigeria streets searching for jobs, which are very difficult to come by [21]. To buttress this situation further, some scholars decried the mass buying and selling of jobs like food stuff or every other consumable [19]. The case is even more worrisome that employment is no longer offered based on merit, but on who you know in government or the society.

Similarly, "submitted that individuals with adequate entrepreneurial knowledge derive sustainable utility from being self-employed, because it gives them a higher sense of self-determination and economic freedom [3]. Unlike the self-employed, "maintained that employees are bound to obey any orders given by their superiors and would always be commanded around, [3]. Some other authors found that lower levels of hypertension, occupational stress and psychological depression amongst those with adequate entrepreneurial knowledge are useful predictors of comparatively higher entrepreneurial skills and attitude, [30]. It was also discovered that this finding is consistent with the general subjective well-being studies, which displays a particularly strong association between entrepreneurial skills and mental health, [22]. This study also found that self-employed people in this 21st century are intrinsically more optimistic and cheerful than others. This implies that a high level of optimism is positively related to an entrepreneur's level of work satisfaction, [21].

To address the issue of unemployment, entrepreneurial

studies should be included in our school curriculum. Another dimension of self-employment has to do with the development of entrepreneurial attitude towards curriculum content. If the curriculum is relevant to students' life and future, the students would show positive attitude to learning about self-employment through entrepreneurial training and skill development. There may be the quest for entrepreneurial knowledge leading to more self-employment ideas, self-sufficiency, self-reliance and independence. Learners of this entrepreneurial skills would develop more positive attitudes to learning, better behavior, regular attendance, improved standards and achievements. This depicts that entrepreneurial attitude is a significant factor in improving teaching and learning entrepreneurial courses in schools. It was stated that in most successful Universities, development of an entrepreneurial attitude is an integral element of a well-planned curriculum alongside special events and activities, which are experienced both within and outside the classroom to enhance students' attitudes toward learning [12].

Self-employment is the state of working for oneself as a freelance using the entrepreneurial skills, knowledge and attitude the person has acquired to enable him/her render services to the public as the business owners rather than an employee. Self-employed people are usually resilient, focused, invest for long-term, find and manage people, sell, learn, and resourceful enough. Some studies found that people with self-employment motives exert tangible positive economic impacts not only on their income but also on per capita national income growth and poverty reduction in their locale [1]. It was further affirmed that individuals with adequate entrepreneurial knowledge generally earn more income by conducting profitable operations from a business that they directly operate [24, 23, 20]. Some scholars have confirmed that entrepreneurial skills for self-employment is a strong predictor to economic freedom, income generation and improvement, employment generation and poverty reduction, this requires workers' commitment and motivation. Among other empirical literature, it has been noted that the self-employed people with entrepreneurial attitude enjoyed higher job satisfaction than employees [1].

2. COVID-19 and SMES in Nigeria

The emergence of COVID-19 pandemic globally, has caused a lot of untold hardship on both small and medium scale business enterprises in Nigeria and in other parts of the world. These hardships emanated from the types of prevention protocol adopted by each government, especially where restrictions were put to avoid personal contacts with victim who had already contracted the virus. A lot of researchers found that these preventive restrictions include isolation, restriction and social distancing [3, 4, 6]. In some cases, people were made to stay at home for weeks, months and most businesses suffered losses, while some shut down completely, whereas

others could not raise money to pay staff salaries or get supplies for their businesses. Some business failures were due to border closures and restriction in air travels, while most goods importation were band or stopped completely. These social preventive measures adopted helped in making some businesses suffer very serious set-backs. These has necessitated most development partners to strive to identify feasible solutions to the problems created by the outburst of the pandemic in Nigeria. Some of the problems encountered by these small and medium scale business enterprises include but not limited to the following:

Down -sizing of staffs, because most businesses could not afford to keep staff they might not be able to pay their salaries from the proceeds they now make from their businesses

Reduction in the demand of supplies of the services of most companies and businesses, these also drastically affected the supply chain of such businesses or services rendered by such businesses

Most perishable goods like agricultural products with very short durability got spoilt or rotten, these amounted to very huge losses to their owners

Restriction, closure of borders which prevented the flow of goods and services across borders, thereby imposing a serious hardship on persons and decline in business feasibility and sustainability as a result of inflation

Closure and restriction of border movement affecting the supplies of goods and services, especially goods gotten from outside the country. This singular measure, increased the prices of goods and services, thereby raising the cost of goods and services leading to inflation and poor tax remittance to government for other social investments.

Laying off of staff leading to increased poor people, where dependents had to suffer unplanned hardship as a result of the loss of their means of livelihoods. Hunger, rent situation among others worsen due to the outbreak of the epidemic followed by the rise in dead toll.

Most businesses, especially the small and medium scale businesses closed down because they could not withstand the pressure occasioned by the burden of the corona virus disease

Civil and public servants were made to stay at home, salaries were paid by government, food production was drastically reduced, hence the cost of buying things increased, while the burden was felt most by those low-income earners.

Schools and other tertiary institutions were forcefully closed, students and teachers sent home. The implications are that more burden of feeding the children increased, petty traders who sold snacks and other consumables in schools to earn their living were sent home with no plan to cushion the effect of the pandemic on them, hence economic hardship became the order of the day.

To meet the daily demands of survival, most people took to crimes like prostitutions, stealing and rubbing, kidnapping and ritual killings just to make ends meet.

Restrictions were also put on local travels, these also put

even more pressure on the local economy than the international border travel restrictions.

There was the increase in the rate of human procreation, due to the lock down, where people were to stay at home. To reduce the stress of boredom, husbands and wives engaged in uncontrolled sex, while girls choose to be closer to their boy-friends, the end result is pregnancy. It was found that globally, an estimated birth of about three million must have been recorded during this period of the pandemic, however, the author did not separate the normal birth from those occasioned by the effect of the lockdown caused by the pandemic on child's birth [18].

In some situation, there were serious labor migration, where people ran back to their place of origin to take refuge from the pandemic.

However, it was posited that there are still some issues caused by the pandemic which has resulted in the current recession and economic meltdown which most countries of the world are yet to come out of it [4]. These authors further stated authoritatively that, the effects of this pandemic were most felt by the youths who are mostly the working-class group of between the ages of 20-55, whereas the death toll caused by the pandemic were more on the adult and dependent age range of between 60-and above. Most authors have observed that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were more on the youth [19, 2, 29]. Some researches had already been carried out to assess the social and political dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian economy, while some looked at the effects of COVID-19 on the international relations between countries. Though, no specific studies had examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the socio-economy of small and medium scale enterprises, the Nigerian youths in perspective, so this present study therefore has the main objective of investigating the socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium scale enterprises on the Nigerian youths.

Three research questions and one commensurate null hypothesis were formulated to guide the study thus:

How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the socioeconomic activities/lives of small and medium scale enterprise in Nigeria?

What are the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria?

What strategies can be adopted to cushion the effects of the COVID-19 on youths in SMES in Nigeria?

Null hypothesis: The Covid 19 pandemic does not significantly affects SMEs sustainability in Nigeria

Research design/methodology

The survey inferential design was adopted for the study, this design is most appropriate as it allows the researcher to take a representative fraction of the research subject which is too large for the researcher to handle for in-depth study and drawing inferential conclusion to enable the researchers make valid generalization about the group. The research setting is Nigeria, while the research subjects

are the youths in small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria. Since the total population of all youths engaged in SMEs, was not known, the researchers decided to use a sample of six thousand (6000) respondents through the multistage random sampling techniques, this was done purposefully at each point, where the total sample needed was divided by the six geopolitical zones, 1000 respondents were to be selected from each zone, where four states will also be selected from the each zone. 250 respondents were randomly selected from any five local government areas accessible during the period of instrument administration. In all a sample of 6000 respondents were selected using the multistage random sampling techniques and accidental sampling method.

The instrument used for data collection is the researchers designed structured questionnaire, which is divided into three section to cover the three questions and the null hypothesis formulated for the study. With the help of trained assistants and local interpreters, the instruments were administered personally at the respective states, there was 100% return rates. The whole exercise took eight weeks for data collection. Two statistical analytical tools were used, the simple percentage and Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. Results of data analysis are presented on tables.

3. Results

Results on table 1 shows sample used for the study, the result indicates that four industry operators had 184 respondents (3.1%) engaged in this business during and before the Covid 19 outbreak. 191 respondents (3.9%) were either motor bikes, cars and tricycles mechanics before the outbreak of COVID-19. The result also shows that 144 (2.4%) were vulcanizers, 294, (4.9%) were into bricklaying and molding, 147 respondents (2.5%) are engaged in power chain saw operations, 152 respondents (2.6%) were also into glass and aluminum fabrications. The result further shows that 178 (2.9%) of the respondents were carpenters/furniture workers, 134 (2.2%) are painters, 403 respondents (6.7%) were traders, 388 respondents (6.4%) were raw food vendors, 335 respondents (5.5%) deal on provisions, 362 (6.0%) are fruits and vegetable vendors.

The result still shows that 269 (4.4%) sell meat, fish and others such stuff, 339 respondents (5.8%) operate restaurants and other eateries, 317 (5.2%) deal on live cow, goats, chicken and other animals as their major business, 314 respondents (5.2%) are engaged in agrobusinesses, 257 (4.2%) are into small scale water factory production (sachet water, bottle water and water keg), 317 (5.2%) are into whole sales of different goods, while 205 respondents (3.4%) are into transportation business. It was also reported that 203 respondents representing 3.3% of the studied sample are engaged in electricals/electronic business of selling, fixing and repairs.

Table 1. Sample distribution by occupation across the Geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

S/No	SMES TYPES	South South	South East	South West	North East	North central	North west	Total	Percentage
1	Tour industries operators	33	31	32	25	32	31	184	3.1
2	Mechanics	36	32	30	34	27	32	191	3.9
3	Vulcanizers	36	27	11	23	20	27	144	2.4
4	Bricklayers/molding	59	64	38	23	36	64	294	4.9
5	Power chain saw operators	8	34	8	28	35	34	147	2.5
6	Glass fabricators	15	34	25	8	36	34	152	2.5
7	Carpenters	28	36	25	28	25	36	178	2.9
8	Painters	8	25	31	28	17	25	134	2.2
9	Traders	64	52	61	92	82	52	403	6.7
10	Raw food vendors/food stuff	62	56	44	96	74	56	388	6.4
11	Provision dealers	71	84	15	43	38	84	335	5.5
12	Fruits and vegetables seller	69	83	28	59	40	83	362	6.0
13	Meat/fish/etc sellers	56	49	8	56	51	49	269	4.4
14	Restaurants/caterers	63	56	60	60	44	56	339	5.8
15	Cow/goat/chicken	40	50	86	33	58	50	317	5.2
16	Agrobusiness	50	53	64	63	31	53	314	5.2
17	Water factory	20	54	70	40	19	54	257	4.2
18	Whole sellers	53	38	75	60	53	38	317	5.2
19	Transporters	36	27	57	15	43	27	205	3.4
20	Electrical/electronics	37	27	49	25	38	27	203	3.3
21	Cybercafé operators	15	21	48	38	28	21	171	2.8
22	Food vendors on campus	53	28	33	47	40	28	229	3.8
23	Beer/Wine shop operators	43	15	48	40	57	15	218	3.6
24	Night clubs/hotels	14	11	31	22	31	11	120	2.0
25	Uncategorized groups	31	13	23	14	35	13	129	2.1
	Total	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	6000	100

171 (2.8%) own cybercafe, 229 respondents (3.8%) are food vendors on campuses, 218 respondents (3.6%) own beer and wine shops including pubs, 120 (2.0%) respondents have night clubs and hotels, whereas, 129 respondents representing 2.1% of the respondents own different businesses that are not categorized among those listed above (see table 1)..

The result on table 2 shows gender distribution by business types as affected by COVID-19 across the 6 Geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Results from table 2 shows that in the south-south, 65% of the business people are male (650), while 35 % are

female (350); in the South east, 638 business operators are male (63.8%), while 362 representing 36.2% are females; in the South west, 625 respondents in this study are male business operators (62.5%), whereas, 375 (37.5%) are female business operators. The result on table 2 further revealed that in the North East, 619 respondents were male business operators and 381 (38.1%) were females; in the North Central, 623 (62.3%) are male business operators, while 377 representing 37.7% were female business operators, whereas, in the North west, 636 respondents representing 63.6% were male business owners, and 364 respondents representing 36.4% are female business owners.

Table 2. Gender distribution of Respondent's based on types of Business across the geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

SMES TYPES	South South		South East		South West		North East	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Tour industry operators	28	5	25	8	32	3	23	2
Mechanics	34	2	34	0	28	3	32	2
Vulcanizers	23	3	24	3	10	1	23	0
Bricklayers/molding	55	4	65	5	37	8	23	0
Power saw chain operators	8	0	40	2	8	0	28	0
Glass fabricators	15	0	33	2	23	5	8	0
Carpenters	28	0	33	3	26	3	28	0
Painters	8	0	23	2	32	2	28	0
Traders	28	36	28	35	34	45	35	57
Raw food vendors	28	34	23	33	25	17	34	62
Provision dealers	35	36	28	31	15	0	30	13
Fruits and vegetables	34	35	28	32	28	0	25	34
Meat/fish etc	30	26	28	30	8	0	20	36
Restaurants/Caterers	25	38	28	33	28	36	34	26
Cow/goats/chicken	20	20	24	26	28	34	12	21
Agrobusiness	34	16	25	38	29	36	35	28
water factory	12	8	20	20	34	35	36	4
Whole sellers	35	18	22	16	30	26	25	35

SMES TYPES	South South		South East		South West		North East	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Transporters	36	0	12	7	25	26	15	0
Electricals/electronics	25	12	25	2	20	20	25	0
Cybercafé operators	15	0	21	0	34	16	38	0
Food vendors on campus	25	28	22	22	12	28	12	35
Beer/Wine shop operators	38	15	15	0	35	18	19	21
Night clubs/hotels	12	2	5	6	23	8	22	0
Uncategorized groups	19	12	7	6	21	5	9	5
Total	650	350	638	362	625	375	619	381
Percentage	65.0	35.0	63.8	36.2	62.5	37.5	61.9	38.1
				Male:	3791	63.2%		Females

Table 2. Gender distribution of Respondent's based on types of Business across the geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

SMES TYPES	North Central		North West		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Tour industry operators	30	2	23	3	184	3.1
Mechanics	25	2	32	0	194	3.9
Vulcanizers	20	0	23	0	130	2.4
Bricklayers/molding	46	0	23	0	266	4.9
Power saw chain operators	35	0	28	0	149	2.5
Glass fabricators	36	0	8	0	130	2.5
Carpenters	25	0	28	0	174	2.9
Painters	15	2	28	0	140	2.2
Traders	25	57	35	35	450	6.7
Raw food vendors	38	36	34	33	397	6.4
Provision dealers	12	26	30	24	280	5.5
Fruits and vegetables	19	21	25	30	311	6.0
Meat/fish etc	23	28	20	29	278	4.4
Restaurants/Caterers	32	12	34	33	359	5.8
Cow/goats/chicken	23	35	12	28	283	5.2
Agrobusiness	8	23	35	15	322	5.2
water factory	15	4	36	35	259	4.2
Whole sellers	28	25	25	23	308	5.2
Transporters	8	35	15	5	184	3.4
Electricals/electronics	28	10	25	2	194	3.3
Cybercafé operators	28	0	38	35	225	2.8
Food vendors on campus	35	5	12	22	258	3.8
Beer/Wine shop operators	34	23	19	0	237	3.6
Night clubs/hotels	23	8	23	6	138	2.0
Uncategorized groups	12	23	25	6	150	2.1
Total	623	377	636	364	6000	100
Percentage	62.3	37.7	63.6	36.4	100	100
	2209	36.8%				

From the summation of data generated as presented on table 2, it was found that 3791 respondents representing 63.2% were males, whereas 2209 respondents, representing 36.8% were female business operators under study. Based on this, it appears that there are more male traders than female traders from this survey.

Question 1: How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the socioeconomic activities/lives of small and medium scale enterprise in Nigeria?

The result on table 3 further shows how the corona virus pandemic has affected small and medium scale business enterprises in Nigeria. The result on table 3 shows fourteen ways the pandemic affected SMEs like closure of borders, staff down-sizing due to paucity of funds, reduction in demand and supplies of goods and services, loss of perishables especially food and other agricultural produce and product, restriction of movements of goods and services due to border closure, the isolation and social distancing

order, non- productivity by civil and public servants, where they were to stay at home to avoid contracting the virus for well over 6 months, yet salaries were being paid. There was the reduction in food production and agricultural productivity, closure of schools leading to increase in crime rate and other social vices like kidnapping, violent protest, destruction of properties occasioning loss of lives and sources of livelihoods, restrictions on local and inter-state travels leading to killing many small scale businesses, unwarranted increase in human procreation, increased poverty and finally, there was capital flight. This situation led to foreign investors hurriedly folding up and taking their investments out of the country and then there was also labor migration out of the country and within the country. All these in no small ways affected the small and medium scale business enterprises in Nigeria and the world over with an alarming human death rate. Finally, the pandemic led to the closure of most businesses due to loss of capitals.

Table 3. *How COVID-19 Affected SMEs In Nigeria.*

How COVID-19 affected SMEs in Nigeria		Scores	Percentage
1	Down -sizing of staffs, due to paucity of fund	570	9.50
2	Reduction in the demand of supplies of the services of most companies and businesses,	537	8.95
3	Loss of most perishable goods like agricultural products with short shelf life	487	8.12
4	Restriction, closure of borders which prevented the flow of goods and services	584	9.7
5	Closure and restriction of border movement affecting the supplies of goods and services,	427	7.12
6	Most businesses especially the small and medium scale businesses closed down	597	9.95
7	Civil and public servants were made to stay at home, salaries were paid by government,	344	5.7
8	Reduction in food production occasioning the high cost of buying things	589	9.82
9	Schools and other tertiary institutions were forcefully closed	201	3.35
10	Increased rate of crimes and social vices	452	7.53
11	Restrictions were also put on local travels, these also put even more pressure on the local economy	450	7.50
12	There was the increased in the rate of human procreation, due to the lock down, where people were to stay at home.	180	3.00
13	Labor migration,	188	3.13
14	Closure of most businesses due to capital loss	394	6.57
Total		6000	100

Null hypothesis: The Covid 19 pandemic does not significantly affects SMEs sustainability in Nigeria

The result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis on table 4 on the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on SMEs' sustainability, show a calculated r-value of 0.688 and a table value of 0.176 at 0.05 significance level and a degree

of freedom of 5998. The null hypothesis is rejected because the calculated r-value is greater (0.688) than the critical table value of 0.176. The result therefore shows that COVID-19 pandemic has significant effects on SMEs' sustainability in Nigeria. Thus, the youths who are major players in these industries are mostly affected by the pandemic.

Table 4. *Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the effects of Covid -19 on SMEs sustainability (businesses) in Nigeria (N=6000).*

Variables	$\sum X$	$\sum X^2 \sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-val
Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic	86345	132566		
SMEs sustainability	78896	144332		

Significant 0.05 level, critical $r=0.176$, $df=5998$.

4. Discussion

Question 2: What are the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria?

Results analyzed so far indicated that the socioeconomic dimension of the COVID-19 pandemic on youths in small and medium scale business enterprises is very serious, as it has caused a lot of harsh economic downturn and impaired most business venture's progress and sustainability. Most businesses have closed down, most entrepreneurs loss their businesses, and do not have the capitals to start all over again, most employees lost their jobs and their sources of livelihoods, most cottage industries accumulated debts they can hardly pay, due to the loss of businesses and jobs, most youths are now engaged in antisocial vices and crimes like kidnapping, armed robbery, rape, drug addictions, ritual killings, violence and cybercrimes. While some youths who are willing hands were recruited by gullible and corrupt politicians to settle political difference by causing the mayhem that happened in Nigeria in the name of peaceful protest which became a very violent protest code named "ENDSARS". During this protest, which spontaneously erupted across the country, properties worth billions and billions of naira were destroyed, government properties and installations were destroyed, lives were lost, businesses

closed down, social order was also disrupted, security situation worsen, and the economy of the country was further plummeted into recession and eventual inflation. Cost of living became very high, schools remained closed and most development activities came to a grand halt. All these have seriously affected the socioeconomic activities which are the major fabric of the Nigerian economy. Above all, the country lost so much in tax return. While monies that would have been used for other infrastructural development activities were rather channeled into providing pragmatic emergency relief and management activities to cushion the effects of the covid-9 pandemic. The pandemic plunged the whole world, which has become a global village into deep recession, most countries are yet to get out of the clutch of the pandemic scourge.

From the foregoing so far, it has been established by the result of analyses of data generated from the field that Nigeria as a country like most countries of the world have been ravaged by the deadly pandemic due mostly to ignorance and the near absence of understanding of the transmission, control and prevention of the virus at it's very early stage. From literature reviewed, it was observed that some scholars found that the covid 19 pandemic dealt a devastating blow on the world globally, as no single nation, region or state was left unaffected, [7, 11, 10]. These authors posited that the devastation came mostly as a result of some of the preventive measures put in place by government and

other stakeholders to curtail the spread of the pandemic since it has already began spreading globally like a wild fire.

The pandemic affected businesses through the restrictions, social distancing, total lockdown, downsizing of staff who were gainfully employed by some of these companies, closure of international borders, restriction of traveling and traveling ban, among others. It was further found that while the pandemic ravages on, the rate of crime increased astronomically, prostitution, ritual killing, stealing/armed robbery, kidnapping and armed banditry among others became the order of the day. The restriction put on border closure, travel ban among others made the supplies and transportations of goods and other services became ineffective and almost impracticable. The supply of food stuffs, essential goods and other social services were either restricted or completely banned. The finding is a confirmation of the earlier finding which observed that after the horror of killing people, then came the total lockdown, where people were forbidden from coming out of their houses, most perishables goods, were rotten and the cost is unimaginable [12]. Those engaged in agrobusiness and agro value chain became the most hit, as their crops were destroyed because it could not reach the ultimate consumers, capitals were lost in quantum, workers were retrench because their employers having suffered huge losses could not afford to pay their wages, hence the need to reduce its workforce to what it really needed and it can pay.

Another study also found a similar result, when they observed that some goods that could not be sold due to the lockdown or restriction expired (drugs, rice, beverages) and other consumables, these goods brought so much losses to their owners and those dependent on them for survival like their sales girls/boys, the supply value chain among others [9]. This study further showed that some business owners could not continue because they lost their capitals, while others have to relocate their businesses to their villages and some remote areas where this pandemic was not really too serious as in the urban centers. The result shows that the pandemic has a very serious effects on businesses in Nigeria, where the proprietors and workers in these small and medium scale business ventures are young Nigerians. Due to these effects, most of the youths are now into all sort of social vices. This is not good for Nigeria economy.

This result and the finding of this study shows that when they are pandemic like in global perspectives like the COVID-19 pandemic, most investors relocate, while those who are foreign leave the country for their own country. When situations like this occurs, there is capital flight, expatriate who are brought in to provide essential services flee the country for safety. This study also revealed a very gray area in Nigerian health system. The government clinic that gulps over 5% of Nigerian annual budget was also found not to have the state-of-the-art facilities in the seat of the federal government of Nigeria. This pandemic occurred less than six months, when the Aso Rock Villa clinic was renovated for a whopping sum of over #1.5 Billion Naira. This exposed the Nigerian government as a corrupt nation,

where even their health care system where the president and his immediate families were supposed to be treated was not given the needed attention it deserved.

The finding of this study is therefore premised on the way the corona virus came into Nigeria with its ravaging effects, especially on how it affected small and medium scale business enterprises. Little wonder, some authors earlier posited that the practicing of handwashing at critical moments and social distancing can reduce the incidence of communicable diseases in most communities [8]. This position was a conclusion of their work on water, sanitation and hygiene in Cross River State (WASH-CRS).

5. Conclusion

Based on the finding of this research, it is therefore concluded that the corona virus pandemic has dealt a devastating blow on Nigerians and most especially on small and medium scale business enterprises in Nigeria. It is necessary to state that the population of Nigerians engaged in most of these businesses are Nigerian youths, therefore, it is this population that are adversely affected by the pandemic in their millions of business endeavors. Unfortunately, as if this is not enough, the second wave of the pandemic is here, deadlier than the first. Thus, we are afraid, the extent to which this second wave will plunge the world further into very critical economic situation, so all hands must be on deck. Since it has been established that the virus is contracted through personal contacts and to some points through airborne, people should do their very best to observe all social protocols, especially the hand washing and wearing of face/nose mask as prescribed by the national and international agencies saddled with the responsibilities of managing the pandemic.

Recommendations /Strategies that can be adopted to reduce the effects of Covid 19 on SMEs

Arising from the foregoing, the following recommendations/ strategies have been suggested to address the problems at hand.

All preventive social protocols must be observed, hand washing, wearing of face/nose mask, social distancing, avoiding of handshakes, covering of mouth and noses when sneezing, etc

Mass education on the prevention and control of the pandemic

Removal of all form of taxes to SMEs, this could be in form of tax rebates, tax holidays or tax exemptions for these SMEs.

Federal government should provide subsidies for food stuffs and perishable goods vendors and traders, and those engaged in their productions and purchasing.

Restriction should be put on the importation of goods that can and are locally produced like beans, rice, yams, cassava, millet, sorghum, guinea corn, maize, mutton, beef, etc

There should be the provision of further incentives for young men to swarm into agriculture and agro allied businesses.

Interest free soft loans should be provided by Food and Agricultural organization, World Bank, Central bank, Agricultural banks and the Bank of Industry for organized business groups, while reasonable period of moratorium should also be considered before these soft loans are given out to beneficiaries

There should be a curriculum overhauling in the Nigerian school systems, where entrepreneurship education should be taught as a necessity and not a luxury subject.

Government should also design deliberate policies to monitor and evaluate the implementation of all social investment funds targeted at cushioning the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and among the youths.

There should be the re-introduction of subject like Arts and Craft, Local Craft, Handwork etc, this can build in the learners the necessary skills to live outside the white-collar jobs.

Youths, should look into value re-orientation, where they should appreciate the value of hard work and longevity to short cut to make money, this should be accompanied with serious punishment for youth criminal activities.

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