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**Working Paper**

## COVID-19 and sustainable development goals (SDGs): An appraisal of the emanating effects in Nigeria

AGDI Working Paper, No. WP/21/026

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

African Governance and Development Institute (AGDI), Yaoundé, Cameroon

*Suggested Citation:* Fagbemi, Fisayo (2021) : COVID-19 and sustainable development goals (SDGs): An appraisal of the emanating effects in Nigeria, AGDI Working Paper, No. WP/21/026, African Governance and Development Institute (AGDI), Yaoundé

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/244201>

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# A G D I Working Paper

WP/21/026

## **COVID-19 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): An Appraisal of the Emanating Effects in Nigeria**

Forthcoming: Research in Globalization

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## **COVID-19 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): An Appraisal of the Emanating Effects in Nigeria**

**Fisayo Fagbemi**

January 2021

### **Abstract**

The paper appraised the emanating effect of COVID-19 on sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Nigeria through the systematic illustration of the prevailing incidents. It was affirmed that the preoccupation with the COVID-19 cases caused many other critical socioeconomic issues (like education, infrastructure development, and employment) to suffer a state of negligence or be overlooked. Like other developing countries, Nigeria could become poorer, given the increased unemployment rate and the anticipated difficulty in servicing debt resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak. Hence, festering challenges including poverty, limited access to health care, low education quality, poor road networks among others, could be further entrenched. These incidents could be detrimental to sustainable development goals (SDGs) 2030 agenda. The current crisis, therefore, poses a threat to Nigeria's development prospects, as it may take more time to recover, especially in the post-COVID-19 era. Thus, it is critical to recognize the significance of securing strong institutional regulatory setup and resources (including financial and material resources) needed to facilitate sustainable change in the economy.

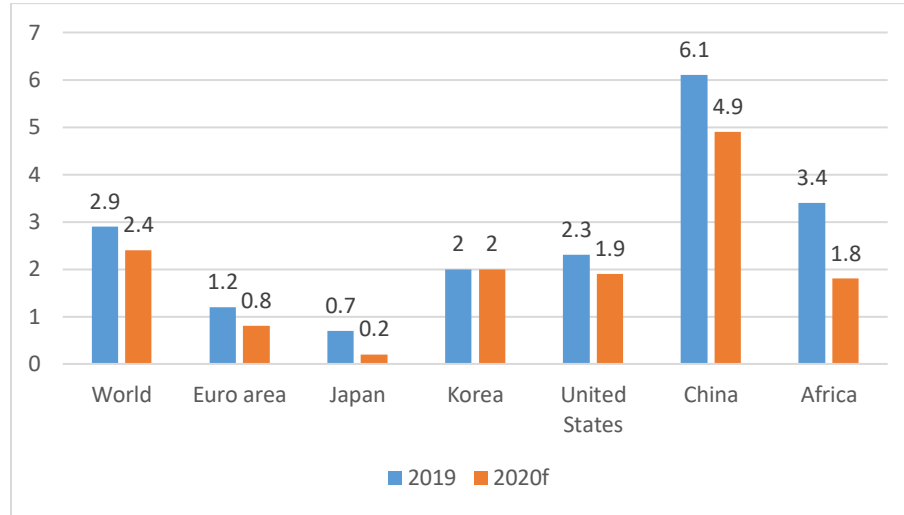
**Keywords:** COVID-19, economic crisis, sustainable development goals (SDGs), Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of the coronavirus pandemic with its searing impact on the global economy seems to have drastically slackened economic activities in the world. COVID-19, which was first discovered in December 2019 in Wuhan city (China), is recently a global challenge to health. It has reshaped our focus and altered the existing status quo in the world economy — showing us a new world with the unprecedented macroeconomic challenges. Given that the COVID-19 has rapidly encircled the globe and consequently affected almost all economies, it has been regarded as a pandemic which has engendered a shift of focus by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2020). Also, according to Gorbalenya et al. (2020), International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) named it a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The policy measures and interventions adopted by governments could result in unavoidable economic downturn across the globe (see Figure 1). While the measures of lockdown and social distance introduced by countries to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus seemed to be necessary, the short-run downside effect is inevitable (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). The COVID-19 virus has not only threatened the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but has also worsened the agreed SDGs (World Bank, 2020). It is a great concern that the current health issue has invariably imposed psychological, social and economic spectrum worldwide.

In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), many countries in the region have been confronted with enormous social and political challenges (including political instability and conflicts, corruption, bad leadership and food shortages). This development has made SSA mostly vulnerable to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, based on the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2020) report, due to poor health systems; prevailing armed conflicts (such as mass killings); large displacement of the population in refugee camps; and governance deficiencies, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are highly exposed to vulnerability. According to The New Humanitarian (2020) report, the pandemic has added to the risks associated with the delivery of humanitarian assistance in these conflicts ridden and fragile economies. Given the

pervasive fragile health system and poor economies in SSA, the region has been greatly hit by the global pandemic (World Bank, 2020).



**Figure 1.** Global economic growth in 2019 and 2020f

Source: Source: OECD, 2020 and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), April 2020

The suspension of economic activities (lockdowns) brought about by the pandemic in both developed and developing countries has led to dysfunctional economic outcomes. Although the prevailing global economic performance has been predicted to cause a large contraction in GDP across the world<sup>1</sup>, the level of the contraction in Africa will be the largest (OECD, 2020). This has raised more uncertainty in SSA countries (including Nigeria) even with the current low rates of confirmed cases in the region compared to other regions (See Table 1). In light of these incidents, the pandemic could cause a largest drop in African GDP (in 50 years) of about -2% in 2020, and force more than 20.4 million people into extreme poverty (The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa ((SDGCA), 2020). Due to the increasing concern, varying forecasts of COVID-19 effects on GDP growth in Africa (See Table 2) have been given by respective international institutions. Africa's vulnerability to the fall in commodity prices is expected to be pronounced<sup>2</sup>. The most critical channel of this shock is through contraction in oil prices, as oil exports account for 40% of Africa's exports (UNECA,

<sup>1</sup> According to World Bank (2020), the global economy will shrink by 5.2 % in 2020, while IMF (2020) predicted 4.9%.

<sup>2</sup> As compared to GDP, low-income countries depend more strongly on natural resource rents than other income sources (Steel and Phillips, 2020), and such dependence has risen over recent years (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2020). <sup>3</sup> In this case, the commodity- and tourist-dependent nations are envisaged to be most vulnerable.

April 2020)<sup>3</sup>. This indicates that countries in the continent would be further constrained by monetary arrangements that would preclude them from the effective implementation of strategic policies. With limited fiscal space and capacity, if the pandemic continues to serve as a haul on high-income countries, there will be availability of fewer funds for investment in Africa. In light of these incidents, a depression threatens, while perceived lower growth prospects will discourage foreign investors, and it can result in inability to generate funds for investment in Africa. Going by the assessment, where improvements are far below or off track the 2030 targets, the backdrop portends a colossal failing for Sustainable Development Goals for SSA (SDGCA, 2020).

**Table1.**  
COVID-19 pandemic by region as of August 10, 2020

Region	Total cases	Total deaths	Cases per million	Deaths per million	Population
Central Asia inc Russia	1,100,679	17,130	4,595	72	239,531,973
European Union inc UK	1,677,699	181,441	3,269	353	513,213,363
Middle East	1,143,188	26,971	3,866	91	295,732,825
North Africa	117,651	5,082	770	33	152,696,504
North America	4,405,014	156,921	12,092	431	364,296,266
South America	3,774,741	135,379	8,921	320	423,117,093
South Asia	2,045,999	43,599	1,128	24	1,814,388,744
Sub-Saharan Africa	708,663	11,856	655	11	1,081,142,280

Source: Max, et al. (2020) - Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) as of 10 August, 2020

**Table 2.**  
COVID-19 effects on GDP growth in Africa

Institutions with dates	African GDP growth prospect
African Development Bank, 3 April 2020 (Adesina, 2020).	Projected GDP growth contraction of between 0.7 and 2.8 percentage points in 2020
African Union Commission, 6 April 2020 (AUC, 2020).	Forecasts show a negative growth from 3.4% to between -0.8% and -1.1%.
IMF Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa, 15 April 2020 (IMF, 2020).	Growth in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020 is projected at – 1.6%, the lowest level on record, a downward revision of 5.2 percentage points compared to six months ago.
Oxford Economics, 26 March 2020 (Oxford Economics, 2020).	The coronavirus-related knock to economic growth in Africa's three largest economies alone could affect the continent's GDP growth from 3.8% to 2.8%.
Brookings Institute, 18 March 2020 (Coulibaly and Madden, 2020).	Africa's GDP growth is expected to fall from 3.5% in 2019 to between 2.5% and 1.5% in 2020.
McKinsey, 6 April 2020 (McKinsey, 2020).	Africa's GDP growth will decrease by three to eight percentage points, from 3.9% in 2019 to between 0.4% and -3.9% in the worst-case scenario.
World Bank, 9 April 2020 (World Bank, 2020).	GDP growth in Sub-Saharan Africa could fall sharply from 2.4% in 2019 to between -2.1% and -5.1% in 2020.
UNECA, April 2020 (ECA, 2020).	Africa's GDP growth prospects are likely to drop from

Source: OECD compilation (OECD, 2020).

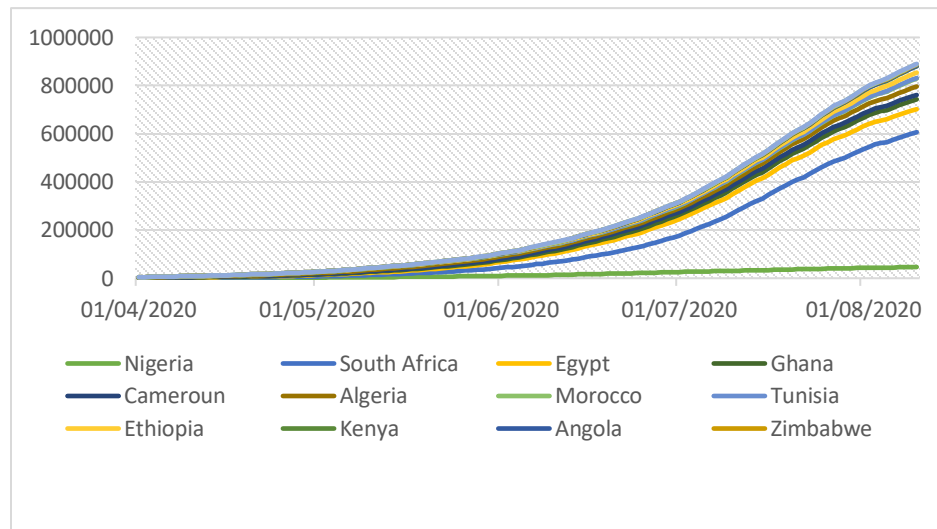
In the face of prevailing economic issues in Africa, the report shows that out of 17 SDGs<sup>3</sup>, in Ugandan, potentially, no poverty (SDG1); reduction of hunger (SDG2); decent work and economic growth (SDG8); industry and infrastructure (SDG9); and inequalities (SDG10) would be the most adversely affected (UNDP-Uganda, April 2020). The similar impact has also been projected for Nigeria (Soto et al., 2020). In addition, with the growing trend of the COVID-19 pandemic (see figure 2), and as schools remained closed in some African countries, the socioeconomic problems can be exacerbated in Africa. As SSA still suffers from festering problems of high illiteracy rate and other critical issues (with highest levels of education exclusion), the number of out of school students can further increase. For example, about 300 million students in Africa (previously enrolled) are out of school owing to measures to abate the spread of the pandemic, of which only 10 million are in higher education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation ((UNESCO), 2020)<sup>4</sup>. The immediate effect of this incident is poor learning outcomes, which will be exacerbated by the limited internet connection and inadequate access to digital devices, suggesting that education gaps between the poor and the rich will widen (Petrie et al., 2020). This stands in sharp contrast to the better performing regions (like Europe, Americas and Asia). The case of African countries, like Nigeria, has been aggravated by feeble governance structures. In particular, in spite of being one of the continent's economic giants (Kiangoi, 2020), Nigeria's fundamental challenges (such as high poverty rate, poor educational qualities among others) are quite alarming which are persistently aggravated by poor leadership and weak governance systems. Due to this, given the COVID-19 outbreak, existing fragile progress made in alleviating poverty and malnutrition and other key SDGs — no poverty (SDG1); reduction of hunger (SDG2); Quality Education (SDG4); decent work and economic growth (SDG8), previously can be reversed, and further hinders positive outcomes. Hence, the 2030 Agenda may be difficult to reach, especially, the attainment of SDGs in Nigeria, and

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<sup>3</sup> SDG1 – No Poverty; SDG2 – Zero Hunger; SDG3 – Good Health and Well-Being; SDG4 – Quality Education; SDG5 – Gender Equality; SDG6 – Clean Water and Sanitation; SDG7 – Affordable and Clean Energy; SDG8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; SDG10 – Reduced Inequalities; SDG11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities; SDG12 – Responsible Consumption and Production; SDG13 – Climate Action; SDG14 – Life Below Water; SDG15 – Life on Land; SDG16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; and SDG17 – Partnerships for the Goals.

<sup>4</sup> Estimates also show that 1.25m students will be affected across the world.

Africa as a whole. Following socio-economic assessments, most African countries have started dealing with adverse effects of COVID-19 crisis (United Nations Development Programme ((UNDP), 2020). As a consequence, this scenario can potentially derail the continent's SDGs 2030 agenda.



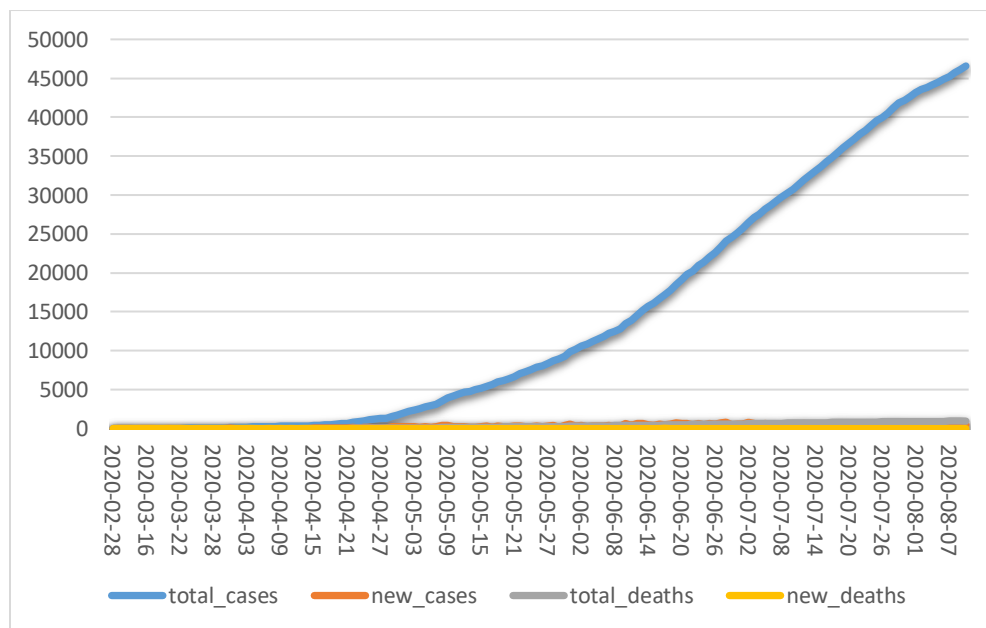
**Figure 2:** Total confirmed COVID-19 cases in African countries as of 10 August.  
Source: Max, et al. (2020) - Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19).

Nigeria, which is one of the SSA countries, confirmed a total of 46,577 cases as of 10 August, 2020. The result shows the intensiveness of the spread of the coronavirus in the country (See Figure 3). The enormous social and economic effects associated with the health crisis seem to have exacerbated existing inequalities and creating new ones, with more severe impacts on the most vulnerable (UNDP, 2020). A country (Nigeria) overwhelmed by the informal sector, the pandemic has caused a huge drop in the quality of livelihood and consumption levels. The attendant impact is becoming an unease conundrum to the economy and peoples' wellbeing. This development could be tied to persisting fragile economic performance over the years. In view of this, there has been concern that the contraction of oil prices because of the pandemic, for a country that depends so much on revenues from oil and gas (Word Bank, 2020), will experience significant challenges.

In recognition of this, Nigeria's development priorities and objectives have motivated most of its policy measures. For example, prior to COVID-19, Nigeria's quest for better performance in key SDGs, based on 2020 Voluntary National Review (VNR) on



Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), necessitates a focus on the critical issues of poverty (SDG-1); an inclusive economy (SDG-8); health and wellbeing (SDG-3); education (SDG-4); gender equality (SDG-5); the enabling environment of peace and security (SDG-16); and partnerships (SDG-17). Nigeria's 2017 VNR identified the institutional dimensions for offering an enabling policy environment for the implementation of the SDGs in the country through its Economic and Recovery Growth Plan (ERGP) (2017-2020). Economic, social and environmental dimensions of development that form the key focus make ERGP in line with the ideals of the SDGs. However, not only that the focus needs to be outlined, it requires effective measures and strong participation to attain. Hence, due to structural defects (like governance deficiencies), despite VNR, Soto et al. (2020) show that the country's indicators of human and physical capital are still low, and even worse than countries with lower GDP per capita. This problem has only aggravated during the pandemic, as it has halted the progress on almost all the SDGs (Word Bank, 2020). Following the recent rankings, based on an aggregate score out of 100 in terms of progress on all 17 SDGs, Nigeria falls in bottom 10 countries (see Table 3). Given this development, the objective of this paper is to broaden the understanding of the perceived impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, and offers a critical reflection that would enhance the level of public awareness on potential alternative paradigms of realistic solutions.



**Figure 3.** COVID-19 cases in Nigeria (28 February – 10 August, 2020).

Source:Max, et al. (2020) - Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19).

**Table 3.**

Rankings of the top 10 and bottom 10 countries on SDGs performance	
Top 10 countries	Bottom 10 countries
1. Sweden (84.72)	157. Niger (50.15)
2. Denmark (84.56)	158. Democratic Republic of Congo (49.71)
3. Finland (83.77)	159. Sudan (49.56)
4. France (81.13)	160. Nigeria (49.28)
5. Germany (80.77)	161. Madagascar (49.14)
6. Norway (80.76)	162. Liberia (47.12)
7. Austria (80.70)	163. Somalia (46.21)
8. Czech Republic (80.58)	164. Chad (43.75)
9. Netherlands (80.37)	165. South Sudan (43.66)
10. Estonia (80.06)	166. Central African Republic (38.54)

Source: Sustainable Development Report 2020 (Sachs et al., 2020).

### 1.1 Pre-COVID-19 Nigerian economic condition and progress on selected SDGs

Over the years, Nigeria has been regarded as one of the most corrupt countries of the world with entrenched mismanagement of public funds. The pervasive government deficiencies have continued to undermine the country's development drive (Fagbemi and Adeoye, 2020). Weak institutions have been responsible for most Nigeria's economic crises (Ozili, 2020). Thus, due to poor governance quality, enhancing human capital development has been a great challenge in Nigeria. These are reflected on the level of progress on some selected SDGs as given;

**SDG1 (no Poverty):**in spite of the emphasis on the poverty reduction based on SDG1, the poverty incidence has remained high. The poor economic management and performance have accounted for the high poverty rate of 40.1% in the country, which represents 82.9 million people (The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2019; World Bank, 2017). This has positioned Nigeria as the leading poverty nation in the world (World Bank, 2019). This implies that no meaningful progress seems to have been attained on SDG1.

**SDG3 (good health and well-being):** In terms of health, although the country had some improvements, as mortality rates of children under five years old contracted by 60% between 1990 and 2018, and a decline of 24% in maternal mortality from 1990-2018.

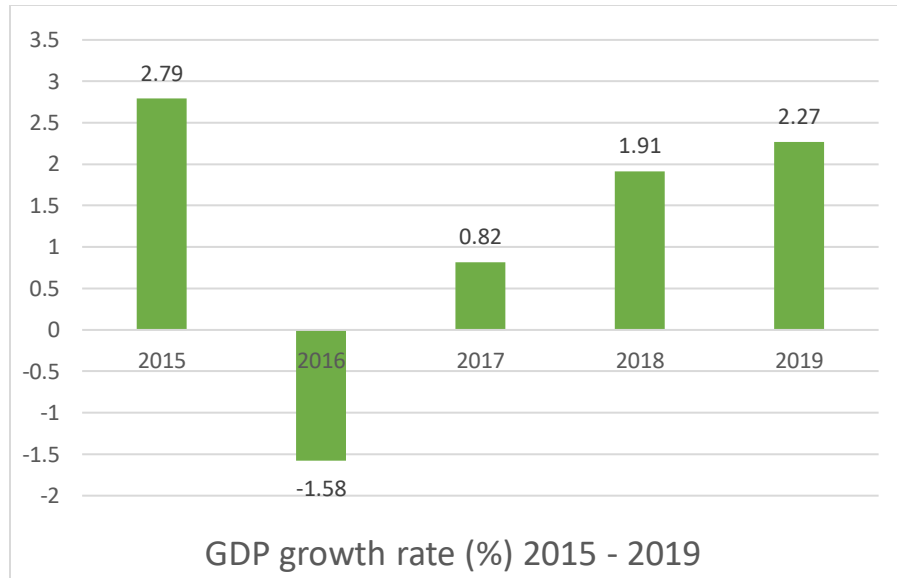
However, globally, infant mortality is still the third highest—far higher than countries with lower income per capita. On healthy life expectancy, with just 49 years, Nigeria is placed among the bottom six countries in the world. Overall, the country's healthcare system is ranked 187 among 190 countries featured (Soto et al., 2020).

**SDG4 (quality education):** Compared to 25% in the advanced economies and 36 % in emerging economies, more than half of the population is of school-age (Soto et al., 2020). The quality of the education system offered is poor (it ranks low in terms of quality measures) as only 20% of the pupils that complete primary school can read a three-sentence passage correctly or fluently (Sachs et al., 2020), while insufficient funds, inadequate infrastructure and lack of materials by teachers significantly contribute to this. As a result, in the index employed to measure education performance, Nigeria's score falls far below.

**SDG6 (clean water and sanitation):** regarding water and sanitation, a number of challenges often prevailed. For example, 47 million people still engage in open defecation, limited access to basic water services by a third of the population, and low investments in water and sanitation assets (World Bank. 2017). Thus, progress on SDG6 is also far below the anticipated target of the SDGs.

**SDG9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure):** on the state of physical capital, Nigeria's road density is still low compared to other countries as conditions of many roads seem deficient. There is absence of reliable assessment of the road network quality (World Bank, 2019). Lack of investment on physical capital (such as roads, and transport) and social capital (like education and health) has posed a threat to the attainment of SDG9 (Ajia, 2020).

**SDG8 (decent work and economic growth):** While Nigerian economy is regarded as the largest in Africa (by GDP) at \$519 billion, it is anticipated to drop by 2.3% in Q1, and 1.8% in Q2 of 2020 (Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (ICA), 2020). In addition, there has been a case of slow growth (See Figure 4), as the population growth rate outstripping the economic growth (Proshare, 2020). Since a significant share of the GDP is required to improve progress across SDGs, the country's case is far from being overemphasized.

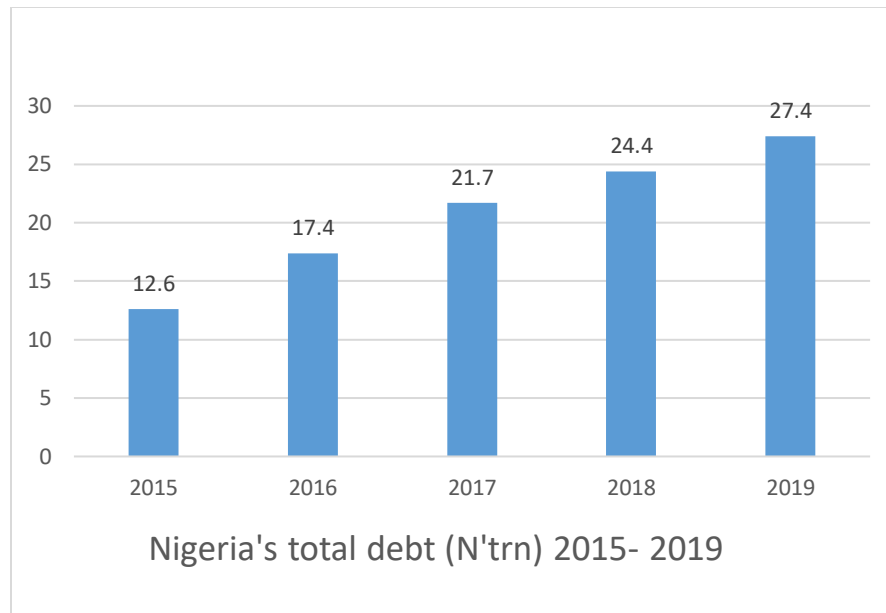


**Figure 4.** GDP growth rate (%) between 2015 and 2019.  
Source: Proshare (2020).

## 1.2 Pre-COVID-19: how Nigeria's fiscal position worsened progress on SDGs

Given the strained fiscal space, even prior to Covid-19, financing most of the essential projects is somewhat difficult. The mounting debt stock with no commensurate increase in factor productivity growth is a major cause of concern. Public borrowings have not impacted significantly on economic value as a noticeable deterioration in performance persists over time. The Nigeria's debt service has continued to undermine its fiscal strength<sup>5</sup>. For instance, recent debt service figures show that the country's debt service obligation in Q1 2020 took about 99.2% of the quarter's fiscal revenue (Proshare, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic could exacerbate this trend (World Bank, 2020). Nigeria's debt has been trended upwards since 2015 (See Figure 5). Plausible arguments for the rise in debts including lower oil prices, and disproportionate financial resource allocation. Over the years, the country's inability to leverage its huge resource endowments for accelerated development has led to poor socioeconomic condition, and in turn makes its fiscal position susceptible to external shocks. Thus, the needed progress on SDGs seemed to be hampered.

<sup>5</sup> Nigeria's external debt rose from \$10.72bn in December 2015 to \$27.68bn in December 2019, a growth rate of about +158.21% (Proshare, 2020).



**Figure 5.** Nigeria's total debt (N'trn) 2015-2019

Source: Proshare (2020).

### 1.3 Nigerian economy during COVID-19

There are two key scenarios linked to COVID-19. The two scenarios are; economic output if the spread of the virus continues and economic output when the virus can be curtailed. If the pandemic keeps spreading with persistent economic disruptions, Nigerian economy would likely witness a critical recession (World Bank, 2020). The gradual rise and spread of the disease in Nigeria has further dampened the growth and developmental outlook of the country. Reflecting on the earliest impacts (such as slackened economic activities) of the virus, Proshare (2020) reported that in Q1 2020 a drop of -0.23% points was recorded for growth rate compared to Q1 2019, and -0.68% points compared to Q4 2019, due to the disruptions in economic activities. Also, as the health crisis demands huge financing to cushion the adverse health, economic and social consequences, SDGs financing gap has widened (OECD, 2020). Given the limited resources and fiscal space, the pandemic has pushed Nigeria into severe financial difficulties. The contraction of international trade, travel and domestic consumption, resulting from intervention measures adopted. These measures, which include lockdowns and suspension of economic activities, have suppressed tax revenues from consumption taxes on which most low- and middle-income countries rely including Nigeria (Kapoor and Buiter, 2020;

IMF, 2020). The decline in public revenues has caused unemployment, theft and others socio-economic issues to escalate. For now, the fragile progress on SDGs seems to have been disrupted by prevailing economic realities (See Table 4). Overall, the current fiscal condition may discourage private investors who need to key into a viable fiscal level for better business performance and effective partnerships with the state (SDG-17).

**Table 4.**

COVID-19: Nigerian economic realities as of April 2020

Economic Indicator	Present	Projection
Inflation (%)	12.34	14.7
Growth rate (%)	2.27	-3.32
Exchange rate reserves(\$'bn)	34.58	27
Unemployment	23.1	43.8
Brent crude(\$/barrel)	31.46	25
Interest rate (%)	12.5	13
Exchange rate (Naira to dollar)	361	458
Total Public debt (N'trn)	25.7	30
Cash Reserve Ratio	27.5	30

Source: NBS, Proshare (2020).

The present crisis and inadequate financing for sustainable development are aggravating the low human capital development level. As the World Bank (2018) reported that Nigeria is one of the lowest ranked countries in the human development index, out of 157 countries ranked, following results achieved on health and education, Nigeria placed 152 in the ranking. Both the general health crisis and the socioeconomic shock have room for severe developmental challenges. The closure of schools has denied many the opportunities to learn, especially the poor. The gap between the rich and poor keeps widening. In the face of deteriorating socio-economic conditions, current economic realities have given rise to social unrest (UNDP, 2020). To put this into context, Nigeria stands out as likely to add 8 million to the poverty rolls in 2020, while India may be 10 million (Kharas and Hamel, 2020). According to Mahler, et al. (2020), even employing the less-demanding World Bank threshold of counting countries that are off-track to attain the SDG goal of eradicating poverty, the COVID-19 impact could escalate poverty in Nigeria. Thus, Nigeria would be among countries that might have the largest rise in poverty rates at least 3% points in 2020. In view of several SDGs issues (including high poverty rate; poor health and well-being; weak quality education; inequality; and poor

economic growth), how to curtail the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic remains critical to Nigeria's sustainable development 2030 agenda.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical review**

With the SDGs, public health, trade, employment, and environmental development are critical to the 2030 agenda. Essentially, human health is integral to all human activities and indispensable for sustainable development (Singh, 2020). Hence, an impairment of health due to a pandemic outbreak like COVID-19 will trigger economic, social and political crises in any economy (Chakraborty & Maity 2020). Aside being a threat to health systems, COVID-19 could cause increased unemployment, inequality, poverty and defacement of humanity (World Bank, 2020). Based on disaster risk modelling framework, in fragile and vulnerable economies with weak primary healthcare, disease-producing agents, economic growth and sustainable development goals are strongly interconnected (United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction Office (UNDRR, 2017). Apart from having a disastrous effect on global health, through lockdowns and economic disruptions, the pandemic has had an adverse impact on almost all the SDGs, as socioeconomics problems have worsened in most developing countries because of the measures introduced to curb the spread of the virus (UNDP, 2020). Impact here implies the effect a particular occurrence (like COVID-19 outbreak) has on SDGs (Filho et al., 2020). Hence, the link between COVID-19 and SDGs can be consolidated by this approach: COVID-19 → public health threat → policy intervention (lockdown) → economic disruption → limited financing → stoppage of sustainable development projects. In this context, Nigeria's focus on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): no poverty (SDG-1); an inclusive economy (SDG-8); health and wellbeing (SDG-3); education (SDG-4); gender equality (SDG5); the enabling environment of peace and security (SDG-16); and partnerships (SDG-17) among others, can be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Word Bank, 2020).

Theoretically, a critical reflection on the theory of economic development (system theory), poor performance stands exacerbated when an economy is not functioning

properly due to certain socio-political factors (Wallerstein, 1974). System theory, which is a sociopolitical approach developed to elucidate global economic development in a capitalistic economy, stresses that a “reduction of state structures and policies to determination by dominant class interests” (Coccia, 2018, p. 6) would have impact on the citizens’ decisions. Since “impact” often exists within a context, from a system theory perspective, the world economy self-adjusts (or organizes) through learning, but suffers structural irreversibility during unprecedented economic strain, and with a propensity for growth to plummet, resulting to the loss of progress and uncertainty in the future (Foster, 1997). The system theory perspective helps broaden the understanding of the perceived influence of a singular factor on economic growth, and the wide economic impact assessment (Wallerstein, 1974). Hence, policies introduced (like lockdown) because of the COVID-19 pandemic would not only affect the economy but also the attainment of SDGs, and thus people’s welfare. In view of this, it could be hypothesized that the COVID-19 outbreak could influence policy focus on SDGs.

Given that the large proportion of the global population lack access to proper sanitation and drinking water (SDG 6), the link between clean water and health is also highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Filho et al., 2020). Tackling poor sanitation problem and rebalancing health system could help improve health outcomes, and thus mitigate the severe impact of COVID-19 on SDG3 & 6 (Soto et al., 2020). In addition, based on social welfare theory, different perspectives are given on how social welfare can be developed to meet the basic needs of the society. For example, good social welfare programs could be beneficial in terms of poverty alleviation, and to help cope with challenges associated with unanticipated disasters like COVID-19 (Luenberger, 1996; Abramovitz, 2001). Thus, improved social welfare services have been a key proven way to protect people from economic hardship in time of socioeconomic crisis (Fleurbaey and Maniquet, 2011; Andersen, 2012). This implies that poverty problem will be better addressed in the period of health crisis, and in turn mitigates the impact of COVID-19 on SDG1 (no poverty). However, such social welfare programs are absent in Nigeria, which has made the coronavirus pandemic in the country caused severe socioeconomic hardship to the people, especially to most vulnerable individuals (Ozili, 2020). Consequently,



COVID-19 outbreak seems to have stalled progress on SDGs in Nigeria. Indeed, social welfare theory offers a link between socioeconomic development and health.

## **2.2 Empirical review**

Based on the literature, the interconnection between public policies and economic activities is not a novel concept, as there is an established relationship between government policies and economy performance (Wallerstein, 1974; Skocpol, 1977). In addition, it has been emphasized that economic disruptions (or crises) (Jones, 2016); market failure (Stiglitz, 2008; Petrakos, 2014), civil unrest through protests (Bernburg, 2016; Grasso and Giugni, 2016); external trade and commodity prices shocks (Gomulka and Lane, 1997; Mendis, 2002; Francois and Woertz, 2009), are often induced by various policies interventions embarked upon by governments. Public policies matter to all individuals irrespective of socio-economic status. According to Jutz (2015), in the analysis of the role of income inequality and redistribution in alleviating income-related health inequalities in Europe, there is adverse association between social policies and health inequalities, suggesting that social policies could cause a reduction in health inequalities in Europe. Also, following Chinazzi et al. (2020), at the beginning of the travel ban from Wuhan on 23 January 2020, while most Chinese cities had already received a number of infected travellers, the travel quarantine of Wuhan slowed down the aggregate epidemic progression by only 3–5 days in mainland China. However, this policy measure had a more severe impact on both domestic and international activities. These imply that the various policy measures introduced by governments across countries because of the COVID-19 outbreak, as necessary safeguards of population health have a significant effect on peoples' well-being, economic activities and sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Haleem et al., 2020). These authors (Haleem et al., 2020) argue that economic effects of coronavirus are: the retardation of the manufacturing of essential goods, disruptions of the supply chain of products, poor cash flow in the market, losses in national and international business, drastic reductions in the revenue growth, while the social consequences including the cancellation or suspension of large-scale

sports and tournaments, social distancing with peers and family members, closure of hotels, restaurants and religious centers.

Similarly, Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010) explore the extent to which social relationships influence mortality risk. The research outcome indicated that there is a 50% rising possibility of survival for participants with more potent social relationships. Across ages; sexes; initial health status; causes of deaths; and follow-up period, the finding is consistent. Using a simple model, Fornaro and Wolf (2020) stress that the coronavirus causes an adverse supply shock, suggesting that sound policy interventions (such monetary and fiscal policy) could be needed to prevent this adverse supply shock from severely impairing employment and productivity. In addition, Ramelli and Wagner (2020) affirm that, through the amplification by financial channels, the current health crisis transformed into an economic crisis. Zhang et al. (2020) show that COVID-19 has impacted financial markets across the world. It has caused investors to suffer significantly due to an unprecedented level of risks involved. Based on Ozili and Arun (2020), overall, lockdowns, restrictions of monetary policy decisions and international travel have greatly affected the level of world economic activities. The present pandemic has not only disrupted the economy, but seems to have increased the likelihood of social unrest, thereby threatens the global peace and justice goal (SDG-16). Also, Ozili and Arun (2020) indicate that given the school closure policy, the COVID-19 outbreak could be detrimental to the quality of education (SDG-4). In general, the rate of inequalities tends to rise due to the impoverishment of countries, which will harm SDG-1 and -10 (no poverty and reduced inequalities) (Filho et al., 2020). Hence, a critical awareness is necessary to secure viable practices and resources needed to facilitate sustainable change across the globe.

Regarding studies on Nigeria, Oruonye and Ahmed (2020) show that the outbreak, coupled with the spread of the disease, in Nigeria, has led to shutdowns of economic activities in most cities and states in the country. They argue that the tourism industry has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the work of Ozili (2020), while analyzing the COVID-19 spillover-effects on Nigeria, posits that the existing structural weaknesses have contributed to the severity of the crisis in the country. Given the large

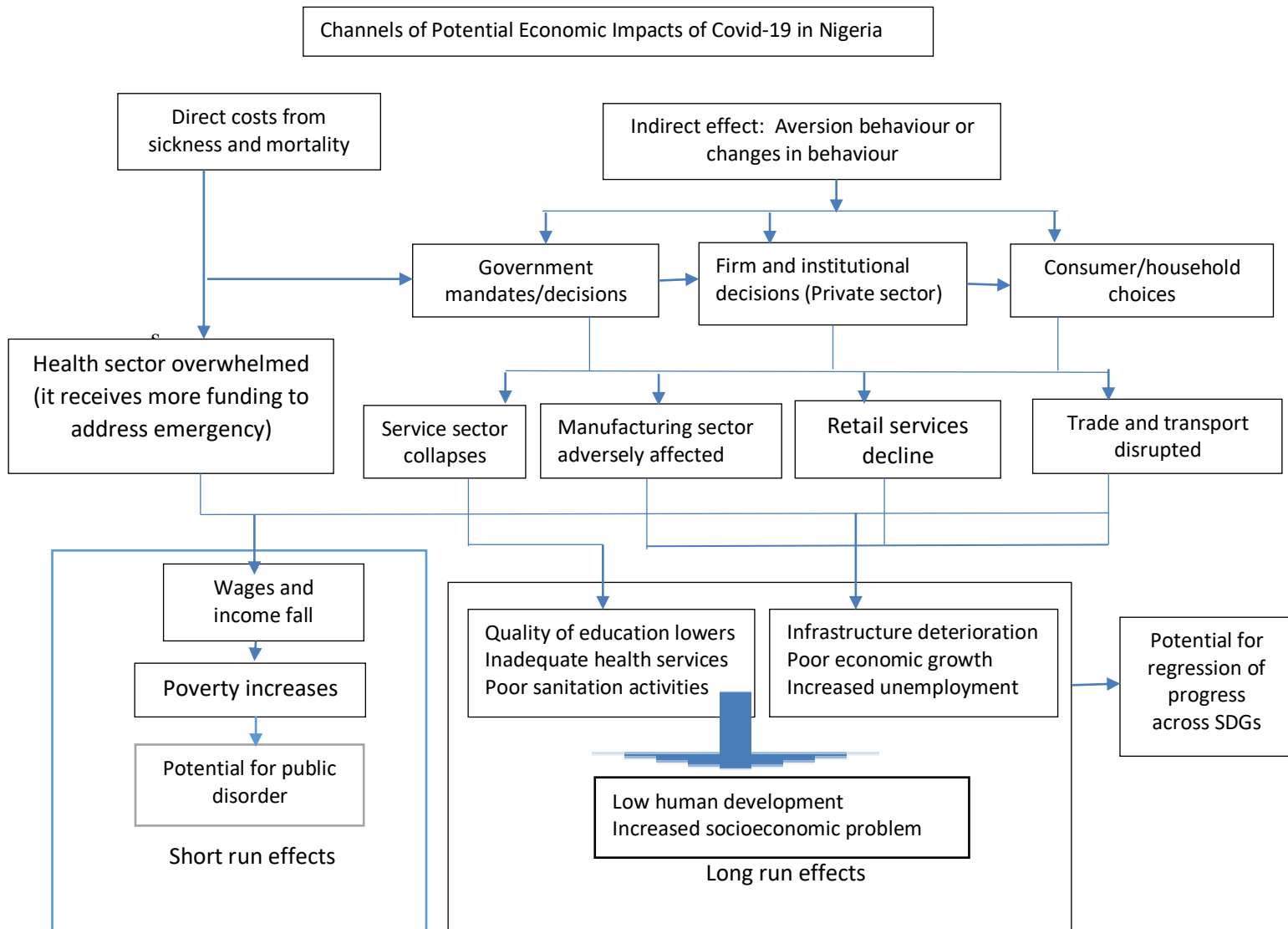
poor population in Nigeria, house orders and other restrictions employed in some high-income countries cannot be practical or may not yield better outcomes (World Health Organization, 2020). Therefore, based on the work of Buheji, et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic would cause a huge setback to all poverty alleviation efforts of the Nigerian government. The preoccupation with the effect of COVID-19 on growth and health services implies that many other critical issues like infrastructural deficiencies, prevailing armed conflicts (such as present terrorist attacks (Boko Haram) on communities), poor education quality, inequalities, fragile fiscal space, and weak institutions may suffer a state of neglect or likely to be overlooked (Filho et al., 2020). Like other developing countries, Nigeria may become poorer, since the increased unemployment rates and the anticipated difficulties in servicing debt obligations imply that chronic challenges such as inadequate food supplies, limited access to health care, poor road networks among others, will exacerbate (Filho et al., 2020). Overall, these empirical evidences are detrimental to sustainable development goals (SDGs) 2030 agenda in African most populous country. The current crisis therefore poses a threat to Nigeria's development prospects, as it may take more time to recover, especially in the post-COVID-19 era.

Furthermore, in both developed and developing countries, it has been reported that current global crisis could stall accelerated progress on SDGs (IMF, 2020), but Sub-Saharan Africa (including Nigeria) viewed to be more affected by the COVID-19 impact on SDGs as a result of the unprecedented economic crisis experienced in the region (Gilbert et al. 2020). According to Global Report on Food Crises (WFP, 2020), food poverty is likely to rise or even double in Africa, indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened limited food supplies (SDG2) in most countries in the region (Filho et al., 2020). Fagbemi and Asongu (2020) in their review, which detailed the likely impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the socioeconomic condition in Africa affirm that the pandemic would further exacerbate Africa's socioeconomic problems. This development is envisaged to further retard progress on SDGs which has been off track the 2030 targets before COVID-19 incidence (World Bank, 2020). Overall, following The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa [SDGCA](2020), growth, inclusion and environmental sustainability which deductively formed the three core elements of the SDGs will be undermined by the COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa.

It is against this background, that this study details the possible impact of COVID-19 on SDGs in Nigeria. To the extent of the above review, exclusive study on SDGs and COVID-19 in Nigeria is limited. Hence, this study centers on the likely impact of COVID-19 on SDGs in Nigeria, with attention given to SDG1 (no Poverty), SDG3 (good health and well-being), SDG4 (quality education), SDG6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG8 (decent work and economic growth). The methodological approach adopted for the work utilizes conceptual analysis which is based on plausible assumptions and reported scenarios.

### **3. Channels of potential economic impact of COVID-19: Conceptual analysis**

This study adopts the conceptual analytical approach of Evans and Over (2020) to shed more lights on the possible impact of COVID-19 on the economy. This is to further broaden the understanding of the pervasive influence of the COVID-19 outbreak. In a weak economic setting, lockdown and economic disruptions resulting from a pandemic will have a noticeable impact on the economy, as it is expected to place unprecedented pressure on the fragile healthcare system (United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction Office (UNDRR, 2017). The assertion is better elucidated by the conceptual framework (see Figure 6). This section therefore demonstrates, in a context of Nigeria, the potential channels of the COVID-19 impact on the country's sustainable development goals (SDGs). Thus, the study could validate the assessed scenarios of international organizations such as IMF, World Bank, and African union (AU). The analysis itself is intended to further illustrate complex intersectoral connections which are fundamental elements of critical development.



**Figure 6.** Broad channels of the economic impact of COVID-19

Source: Author's adaptation from Evans and Over (2020)

Given the prevailing global development, the outbreak has affected the level of economic development as well as economic decisions (World Bank, 2020). Figure 6 illustrates or shows the channel through which the current policy changes affect SDGs in Nigeria. COVID-19 impact can be viewed from two distinct channels: First, the direct cost from health crisis (sickness and mortality) caused by the disease. This can involve the cost an income earner bears when he/she falls ill, causing the shrinking of the active

population/dependents ratio. In this illustration, this can be compounded by reduced wages or loss of income, thereby accentuates poverty levels – by illustration it is termed short-term effects. According to Diwakar and Shepherd (2018a), ill-health and low resilience capacities can spur poor economic performance. The authors' study was centered on eleven (11) Sub-Saharan African countries, and South and Southeast Asia. In the analysis, it was found that when there was no health insurance or other forms of universal health coverage, reactions to health shocks by the poor often accompanied by distress sales of assets, and taking out loans from informal moneylenders, most times at excessive rates of interest. Hence, COVID-19 could reinforce existing problems and serve as another source of impoverishment, and in turn inhibits the capacity of vulnerable households to get extricated from poverty (Diwakar and Shepherd, 2018b).

Second effect, which can be termed indirect effect, is behavioral aversion (people tend to behave in an unusual way). This occurs as a result of the fear of contacting the virus, resulting to fear of associating with people and a decrease in labour force participation in the economy (UNDP, 2020) — closure of schools and businesses, transportation disruptions. This has caused governments to shut the border (placement of restrictions on both internal and international movement) and private business owners to disrupt trade and economic activities. As shown in Figure 6, this behavioral aversion occurs in three ways;

- a) Ban imposition on many activities by governments through lockdowns or suspension of activities. It is mostly motivated by the concern to curb the spread of the disease.
- b) Decisions by firms and institutions. This comes with closures of businesses and schools.
- c) Households' or individuals' choices including the reduction of visits to the market and avoidance of social gatherings or activities.

Based on UNDP (2020) reported scenarios, these actions have a significant influence on the key sectors that contribute to GDP of a country (such as agriculture, the health sector, education, manufacturing, trade and transportation). These can engender decreased income from both the supply side (low production induces price hikes) and the demand side (a reduction in demand from consumers adversely affects business owners and their workers). In view of this, long term growth prospect can be threatened as well as the progress across SDGs.

As more financial resources are diverted to the health sector, and as social activities reduced, countries tend to invest less in physical infrastructure. Also as schools shutdown, with lost opportunities to learn, vulnerable students may find it difficult to return to school. This can lead to lower long-term learning in the country, and thus triggers increased inequality and reduced human capital development. The socioeconomic implications of these incidences are far beyond human anticipations. For example, considering greater inequalities; unprecedented human rights abuse, informal sector expansion and retardation of progress across SDGs that potentially follow in developing countries including Nigeria, the impact of the pandemic could be unbearable.

#### **4. Concluding remark**

The paper appraises the emanating effect of COVID-19 on sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Nigeria through critical analysis of the prevailing incidents. It reveals the potential channels through which COVID-19 can affect SDGs in the country. Across the globe, governments are using two fundamental approaches (interventions) to response to the COVID-19 pandemic; mitigation and suppression. While these strategies seem necessary to curb the transmission rate, they are accompanied by serious economic and social implications. Unlike developed countries, these measures may not be viable due to certain underlying factors (like government deficiencies) in a country like Nigeria. In the country, the healthcare infrastructure (weak healthcare) poses a severe challenge (UNDP, 2020; World Bank, 2020). Intervention strategies, including lockdowns, disproportionately affect the poor and their livelihoods. This is exacerbated by pervasive institutional deficiencies in the country — abrupt suspension of the means of livelihood could lead to socio-economic crisis. The paper systematically gives an illustration of the implications of the global response to the pandemic on Nigeria's development prospects. It draws lessons from the prevailing incidents. The central argument is well beyond reducing or mitigating the spread of the disease, but how to implement viable intervention measures (internally and economically suitable measures) in a way that will not further engender entrenched suffering. Sound policy measures for enhancing social wellbeing and progress on SGD's in the country are critical. Adopting pro-poor policy

approach seems to be a good way in the face of perceived strained public trust and fiscal space. In the absence of this, sustainable development efforts could be jeopardized.

It was further affirmed that the preoccupation with the COVID-19 spread could cause many other critical issues such as infrastructural deficiencies, prevailing armed conflicts (like present terrorist attacks (Boko Haram) on communities, and other social unrest), poor education quality, inequalities, fragile fiscal space, and weak institutions, to suffer a terrible state of neglect or likely be overlooked. Like other developing countries, Nigeria could become poorer, given the increased unemployment rates and the anticipated difficulties in servicing debt. Hence, the festering challenges including poverty, inadequate food supplies, limited access to health care, poor road networks among others, would be further entrenched. These could be harmful to sustainable development goals (SDGs) 2030 agenda. The current crisis therefore poses threat to Nigeria's development prospects, as it may take more time to recover, especially in the post-COVID-19 era. Thus, it is critical to know the importance of securing strong institutional regulatory setup and resources (including financial and material resources) needed to facilitate sustainable change in the economy. For instance, any strategy should be conflict sensitive approach in such a way that it will incorporate the identification of risk and opportunities as central to ensuring that the existing fragility is not worsened by government strategies.



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