

# THE PERCEPTION OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIA

By *Mercy Omuero Edejehwro*,



With the spread of COVID-19 across the globe, in mid-January, 2020, most Nigerians became apprehensive about its outcome when it eventually hits Nigeria especially as it is highly populated. This fear was further heightened with the confirmation of the index case on 27<sup>TH</sup> of February, 2020. Social media platforms

became flooded with stories and videos on the spread and mortality associated with COVID-19. The Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), responsible for the implementation of strategies to track the epidemic in Nigeria immediately swung into action. The Nigerian President also established the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 to manage the outbreak of the disease across the country. Various propagandas were raised regarding the cause of the disease. Some Nigerians in countries abroad where COVID-19 was already having devastating effect started travelling back home in order to avoid the disease. This led to a further spread of the disease.

Nigerians became their own doctors as those who had symptoms of malaria, COVID-19 or any other ailment resorted to home remedies such as “agbo”, a locally brewed juice from fruit leaves, for fear of going to the hospital and being confirmed as corona virus patients or contracting the disease from the hospital.

Residents started calling out the Government to place ban on international flight as well as lockdown. However, this did not immediately take place until March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020. When the lockdown was finally announced, those who had the means rushed to the markets to stock their houses with foodstuffs, soaps and toiletries in case of any eventualities while those with no means just watched to see how everything plays out.

People started taking different things such as ginger, garlic and lemon as they believed it could boost their immunity and wave off the virus. The consumption rate of “agbo” and alcohol also increased as it was believed to be effective in fighting against the virus.

There was much sensitization on radios and televisions about the disease especially on the need to wear masks in public and washing of hands. The different state Government were not left out in the fight against the disease as some of them took the initiative to place ban on social gatherings of more than 20 or 30 persons, establishment of isolation centers, curfews as well as inter-state travel ban even before the federal Government gave the directive to do so. In order to halt the spread of the disease, most markets were relocated to schools and scheduled for two to three times a week with buyers and sellers expected to observe the protocols. Bus drivers were advised to only commute 50% of their vehicle capacity. This led to hike in transportation fare as passengers had to pay for the remaining 50%. This in turn led to increase in price of food stuffs as local food farmers and food marketers depended on the public transport system.

With time however, people became increasingly skeptical of the disease especially as the death toll was significantly low compared to that of other countries. Some people began to call it different names such as “*scamdemic*”, alleging that the figures were framed up in order to instill fear in the minds of people. More so, some citizens began to see it as a disease that specifically targets the rich and influential as only politicians, public office holders and celebrities claimed to be infected. The doubt was further compounded as most persons claim not to have seen or know anyone that has contracted the disease. Due to this disbelief, a lot of residents do not see the protocols as something meant to protect themselves and their loved ones but as a burden. This is evident in the non-compliance of the measures put in place by the Government to curb the spread of the disease as well as the way people wear mask on the chin, exposing their mouth and nose. Also, most people do not adhere to COVID-19 protocols willingly except when they are forced to do so either by policies such as the “**No mask No entry**” currently being implemented in some organized institutions or by payment of fine by protocol violators imposed by the Government. While there was still ban on social and religious gatherings, some religious bodies still sneaked to organize service as they reasoned that COVID 19 cannot be in their place of worship. A lot of persons, particularly those who lived on daily wages lost their sources of livelihood as a result of the pandemic especially during the period of lockdown as there was restriction of movement. This brought untold hardship to them. The Government on its part claims to have disbursed money and palliatives to the “poorest of the poor” in order to cushion the effect of the lockdown, however, most people claim not to have received anything. Till date, some are still trying to adapt to the after effect of the lockdown and have vowed not to observe another lockdown should there be need for it, as they feel that the hunger associated with lockdown is more deadly than the disease itself.



**Figure 1 A Food trader in the market putting on mask on the chin, exposing the nose and mouth**

In conclusion, more sensitization needs to be carried out to correct the perception of most persons on COVID-19. This is to enable the adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures. There is also the need to enlighten the public on the right way masks should be worn to offer protection. It is also recommend that health campaigns should be more focused on practices such as regular hand washing with soap and water and social distancing, which protect against transmission of COVID-19.