

The Corona-Virus Pandemic and its Impacts on Human Security in West Africa

Chukwueloke Emmanuel Chukwufumnaya¹, Ejiroghene Augustine Oghuvbu²

Abstract: The outbreak of the novel corona-virus pandemic across the globe has presented itself as a global crisis which calls for urgent global attention. The viral spread of the virus in different continents remains an overall concern to public health and for human security. This article discusses the impacts of the corona-virus pandemic on human security in West Africa. It argues that the realities from the spread of the virus have created an atmosphere of panic resulting in a pandemonium across West Africa. The study reveals that the spread of corona-virus comes along with new emerging threats to peace and security in West Africa. The paper upholds the 1994 Human Development initiative from the reports of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to discuss essential dimensions to human security in West Africa. Through the use of secondary data, the paper argues that the impacts of COVID-19 tramples upon various dimensions of human security across West Africa states ranging from economic, health, political, community, environmental, and food security. The studies envisage that public health issues should be included on the top agenda of international organizations like the UN Security Council, Africa Union, and ECOWAS respectively. It concludes that the impacts of the pandemic will recalibrate the socio-political and economic structure of states within the sub-region. The study recommends that greater supports from states within the region and other regional institutions alike will help a great deal in the fight towards eliminating the virus from the region.

Keywords: Corona-virus; human security; pandemic; peace; West Africa

1. Introduction

The corona-virus disease is an infectious disease, which can be spread primarily through contacts with an infected person. The virus has been described in the form of a protein molecule with a sheer covering of lipids. The deadly corona-virus began to spread towards the end of 2019, after a mysterious illness was reported in Wuhan, China. The outbreak of the disease which has spread to different countries around

¹ Covenant University, Nigeria, Address: KM 10 Idiroko Rd, Ota, Nigeria, Corresponding author: emmanuelchukwueloke13@gmail.com.

² Covenant University, Nigeria, Address: KM 10 Idiroko Rd, Ota, Nigeria, E-mail: austineoghuvbu@gmail.com.

the globe has made it to be recognized as a global pandemic (Martinez-Alvarez, 2020).

According to Antonio Guterres the UN Secretary-General, as cited in Murphy (2020), the pandemic is a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security with the potential of leading to an increase in social unrest and violence which hinders the ability to fight the disease, conversely, a global solidarity with a coordinated response can help conquer the virus. Every global crisis impacts not only the structure of the international system but can also alter the existing norms across different sub-regions even though the impacts of the virus varies from country to country. Niazi (2020), explains that the disruption done by the current pandemic may take an ample time to reach recovery with new realities that will emerge as different countries seek for an end to the pandemic. This may require states to alter existing priorities to guard against any future pandemics.

West Africa states which include (Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra-Leone and Togo) are not left out in the fight against the virus. The pandemic has created an atmosphere of panic which has resulted in a pandemonium in the socio-political and economic structure of states within the region. West Africa is no stranger to deadly epidemics, having battled with the Ebola outbreak in 2014, this has made the region stronger in the guard against the continuous spread of the corona virus. The lessons from the Ebola experience in West Africa can be used to enhance the preparedness in fighting the current pandemic. It is against the backdrop that this study seeks to identify and discuss in relative terms the impacts of the spread of the virus on human security across West Africa.

1.1. Method and Structure

Relevant secondary sources of data such as books, journals, periodicals, and internet sources were used for this study. The paper is divided into five sections. Section one gives an introduction, section two present the human security theoretical framework as adopted by the United Nations Development Program UNDP. Section three discusses the emerging threats from COVID-19 across the West Africa region. Section four discusses the impacts of the corona virus on human security in West Africa. While section five concludes the work with proffered recommendations.

2. The Human Security Theoretical Framework

The concept of Human Security is more often associated with the 1994 Human Development Report preached by Mahbuh ul Haq (UNDP 1994). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defined human security as providing safety for people against diseases, hunger, oppression, and other chronic threats as well as protecting them from sudden and harmful disruptions in the pattern of human daily life (Cited in Muguruza and Amado, 2017). Human Security theory emphasizes the people, their protection, and the safety of persons, the global environment, health, food security, economic, political, and their communities. This concept of human security has, therefore, challenged the traditional dominance of the state-centric paradigm of security. This theory opines that the proper referent for security should be the individual rather than the state (Cited in Muguruza & Amado, 2017).

The UNDP's 1994 Human Development Reports concept of human security argues that the scope of global security is expanded to include threats of economic security which requires an assured basic income for individuals, usually from productive and remunerative work; food security that relies on both physical and economic access to basic food; health security, aims to guarantee a minimum protection from diseases and environmental security supports the protection of people from the short and long term ravages of nature and deterioration of the natural environment (UNDP, 1994). Human security also aims at protecting individuals from physical violence, whether from external states or from within the state. The spread of democracy and human rights brought about reconsidering the concept of security. The international society consideration of the rights of the individual in the face of potential threats from the state brought about an individualized concept of security (Tadjbakhsh, 2007).

One of the main approaches which best guarantee the practicability of Human Security is the "freedom from want approach" it advocates a holistic approach in achieving human security and argues that the threats agenda should be broadened to include hunger disease and natural disasters because they are inseparable concept in addressing the root of human insecurity (Tadbakhsh, 2007) and they kill far more people than war, genocide and terrorism combined. Dorn (2001), opines that striking a balance between the authority of the state and the freedom of the individuals is essential for human security to be achieved. The concept of human security should also embrace both the dichotomies of individuality and universality of indivisibility and personal freedom of both individual and collective rights of people (Dorn, 2001).

2.1. Application of Human Security Framework to the Study

Generally, the state has to initiate good policies to solve societal problems, especially policies that will impact on the lives of citizens positively. According to Maslow and Burton, humans have basic needs that are essential for survival (Marker, 2005). The outbreak of COVID-19 possess as a hindrance for humans in meeting their basic needs. As a result of the pandemic, citizens especially the vulnerable in developing countries lack the government attention to their basic needs because the major attention of the government has been given to COVID-19 patients within the country.

Hence, there is a need for the government to put together its various institutions to intervene concerning the wellbeing of its citizens if the impacts of the pandemic remains alarming. According to human security theory, the focus on security should be based on the people rather than the state. Since lockdown within a state is to curb the viral spread of the virus people need to be protected from hunger, diseases, oppression, and other persistent threats (UNDP, 1994). The international community is faced with different security threats, which range from the compulsory shutdown of tourist centers around the world, vacations from sporting events, food insecurity, social inequality, and other human security needs.

It is expedient, therefore, that the World Health Organization and the UN security council should begin to see a need to include health issues on the agenda of the council and must admonish states to improve upon its health care policies and regulations in different countries, to meet the demands in the quest to conquer the pandemic. As highlighted by Tadjbakhsh (2007), human security defects can kill more people than war, genocide, and terrorism combined if given less attention.

3. Corona Virus Pandemic: a Threat to Regional Peace across West Africa

The viral spread of the virus reveals that humanity is in danger, according to Dorn (2001), the world may never be at peace except people have security in their daily lives. The peace at both the regional and world arena is a desirable value for every citizen and its society, but the corona-virus pandemic has added to the many forces which regional organizations like ECOWAS reckon within a quest to ensure regional peace. There are fewer doubts that the corona-virus pandemic will lead to enormous changes for the different countries around West Africa as these countries are beginning to see a glimpse of the many threats to peace across the region. The pandemic does not only expand the existing peace and security challenges in West Africa but also constitutes an additional security problem in dealing with the crises.

As a result of the increase in the number of infected cases in West Africa more stringent measures have been adopted by the government in the region to quell threats arising from the spread of the virus these include the closure of borders (land, sea, and air), with compulsory quarantine procedures, a state of public health emergency alongside curfews and lockdowns to curb the spread of the virus. The pandemic has spurred up a whole series of unintended developments in circumstance which includes the loss of livelihoods for the citizenry, with a new level of usual uprising, terrorism, and the cessation of ongoing peace building operations in conflict zones across the region. On the other hand, effective distribution of aids to people who needs humanitarian assistance have also been hindered (Herrmann, 2020).

As the world keeps high focus in the fight to curb the novel COVID-19 pandemic, both Boko Haram and the Islamic State for West African Province (ISWAP) have also stepped up attacks across the region. Security experts have raised concerns and warning signs to countries like Nigeria, Niger, and Chad to remain on high alert against these terrorist groups which may take advantage of the global focus against the pandemic, especially in the Lake Chad Basin. According to Jalloh (2020), overstretched resources earmarked for the region for security upkeep in fighting violent extremists and the provision of healthcare and humanitarian supplies have been diverted to curb the widespread of the pandemic across West African states (Jalloh, 2020).

Amongst the many threats from the spread of the virus, is an increased contestation for global relevance for the permanent members of the UN Security Council

especially for China. In contrast, China has seized the opportunity to gain influence over other states through humanitarian gesture (Beckleman, 2020). China has strategically and diplomatically position itself as leading the international response to potential widespread of Covid19 on the African continent. Speculations are pointing to a more diplomatic tie for China in the African Continent if the Chinese succeed in building "An African Centre for disease prevention and control research facility in Kenya. The Chinese have also stretched more hands of assistance by sending medical expatriates to contain the spread of the virus in Nigeria. All of these have made the region a highly contested zone by the world powers.

4. The Impacts of Corona-Virus Pandemic on Human Security in West Africa

The impacts of the outbreak of corona-virus on human security alongside its several global implications cannot be overemphasized as it has become both a continental and a regional threat and a concern to human security, this is because the spread of the disease can be transmitted from human to human through close contact. The UNDP (2020), opines that the outbreak of the corona-virus pandemic is a health crisis that will leave a deep scar on the face of the globe for quite a long time (UNDP, 2020). The virus sets a reminder of human dependence on a healthy biosphere which underscores the urgent need for the world to preserve its threatened biodiversity (Stewart, 2020). The COVID-19 virus has also struck most fragile states especially those with poor governance system have been deprived from resolving internal conflict peacefully across the Sahel region.

Hence the essence of human security against pandemics would remain a broad international responsibility to detect and contain the disease with immediate response capabilities sufficient to meet global emergencies and proffer cures (Kellman, 2020). Globally, human security remains an essential paradigm in describing all kinds of global vulnerabilities. It covers a large scope of human activities which include, personal, community, economic, environmental, food, and health issues (Ataman, 2020). The concept of human security, will always take a people-centric approach which embraces both the dichotomies of individuality and indivisibility of personal freedom of peoples collective and individual rights, but there must be a striking balance between the authority of the state and the freedom of the individual (Ataman, 2020).

McLean Essiene as cited in Tarallo (2020) explains that the pandemic will serve as a litmus test for organizations across West Africa. In describing the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on West Africa security he argued that organizations without risk management plans are also likely to struggle from a failed structure unless an appropriate corresponding back up plan is initiated. Secondly, there is a need to pay more attention to Zoonosis "the transmission of diseases between animals and humans alike" since several scholars have argued that corona-virus originates from bats (Tarallo, 2020). Human security must remain a flexible approach that will always consist of different topics within different contexts. Understanding human security at all front would also require identifying particular threats experienced by a particular group of people with their active participation in the analysis process (Gasper, 2012).

The 1994 Human Development Report identifies seven essential dimensions of human security all of which have experienced threats from the spread of the corona-virus in West Africa they include:

1. Economic;
2. Health;
3. Personal;
4. Political;
5. Food;
6. Environment;
7. Community.

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, food insecurity has always been a severe concern across Africa, one of the impacts of this pandemic reveals that the longer the time to be set free from this pandemic the greater the food security challenges. The UN food and agriculture organization speculates that the COVID-19 pandemic will disrupt the world's food system. There exist possibilities of food shortages in developing countries especially in countries already suffering from malnutrition and other forms of food insecurities. The pandemic have caused significant disruption in the global food supply chain, as a result of these, children might face the lack of essential food nutrient in their diets as this may call for more stringent scrutiny of food consumption as a result of food insecurities. A synergic approach between the UN, ECOWAS,

and the World Health Organization will help merge up the fragile food supply chain (Fiondella, 2020).

Tiensin (2020) posits that it is essential to increase the resilience of the various food systems, by building on the existing global mechanisms such as the "committee on world food security" this will create platforms for food policy discussion. In parts of the developing world as well as in West Africa, the pandemic have formed a tandem with famine which is a corresponding deadly killer than even the virus itself. In line with the lockdown policies, there is likely hood that almost every country across West Africa would experience economic recessions as part of the post-pandemic realities. On the other hand, tourism which also contributes to the national income in many African countries has experienced a compulsory vacation as a result of the national lockdowns in different West African countries (Gerson, 2020).

The complexity and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic is also a threat to public health and the sanctity to guarantee international human rights laws. Everyone is entitled to the highest standard of health care for which the government is obligated to prevent threats to public health and to provide medical care for those in need of it, but the pandemic have revealed the near-collapse of the health system in most developing countries, and on the contrary, there is an infringement on human rights such as those resulting from the imposition of quarantine and isolation of people limits freedom of movement (Wurth, 2020). Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Mali are a clear case in point of a situation where people keep struggling to access government health centers as a result of several restrictions (Turse, 2020).

Siwisa (2020) comprehends that the decline in the global demand and supply has also resulted in a sharp reduction in key commodity prices and export volumes with a high expectancy that countries in West Africa would fall into recession as part of post-COVID-19 realities within the sub-region. Although it is quite not surprising that countries in West Africa are facing difficulties to implement counter strategies in the fight against the virus. The West Africa Peace and security report (2020) also explains that the environmental security in the region have also been challenged by the spread of COVID-19 as many communities across ECOWAS countries experience water shortages both in urban and rural communities across the region. The campaigns for consistent hand washing in the region as a tool to mitigate the spread of the virus have suffered a setback. On the other hand, the World Health Organization have preached on the need to maintain a healthy environment all through the fight against the pandemic, hence waste materials from medical centers

must be properly disposed to prevent the secondary spread of the virus as a result of an unhealthy environment.

The political structures across West Africa have also felt the impacts of the pandemic as upcoming elections in countries like Cote d' Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger may reconsider postponing their elections with a new time table to ensure inclusive participation by its citizenry, with all of these there is the likelihood of increasing political debates and contestation within these states (Honukpe, 2020).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has vividly and pertinently discussed in clear terms, the need to curb and possibly end the spread of the virus across the West Africa sub-region as its many impacts would recalibrate the socio-political and economic structure of states within the region. Although many innovative and local initiatives to fight Covid-19 has been adopted. For example, universities produce hand sanitizers, civil society actors distributing kits for hand washing, and leading communication campaigns on preventive measures in local dialects, as well as private sector repurposing manufacturing processes, to produce personal protective equipment (PPE). The outbreak of the corona-virus pandemic has increased fears and distorted the preexisting structures across the region. Many jobs have been affected including the world of sports, the nature of the pandemic have also heightened the level of regional insecurity.

This means that a post-COVID-19 reality may hinder the pace for development as envisage by regional structure like ECOWAS. Hence the study recommends that greater support to ECOWAS and other regional institutions is also important, the governments should support and strengthen alternative medical structures at the community level to ensure the health security of elderly, infants, women including alternative sexual and reproductive health information services during the crisis. It is also imperative for the government to enhance the decentralization of response to COVID-19. ECOWAS, through West Africa Humanitarian Organization WAHO, should continuously provide technical and financial support to member states in the fight towards eliminating the virus in the region.

In collaboration with the international community, the West Africa Governments should initiate policies to address the immediate needs of poor communities and groups whose livelihoods have been impacted by the pandemic as well as support to

IDPs and refugees who are at risk of infection of the virus. Governments in the region should ensure timely disbursement of stimulus financial packages to cushion the effects of the pandemic on the economy of West Africa states as well as follow up with strategies to ensure transparent and equitable distribution of such packages to both formal and informal sector.

References

- Ataman, M. (26 February, 2020). *Coronavirus A Human Security Issue*. SEFA Publication.
- Beckleman, T. (20 March, 2020). The Corona virus requires global cooperation now. *The United State institute for peace*.
- COVID 19 and Conflict: Seven Trend to Watch. (2020, March 24). *International Crisis Group*.
- Dorn, W. (2001). *Human Security: An Over View*. Pearson Peace Keeping Centre.
- Fiondella, F. (2020). COVID-19 Disruptions: Understanding Food Security Implications. *State of the Planet Earth Institute*.
- Gasper, O. A. (2012). *Human Security A Thematic Guidance Note for Regional and National Development*. Regional National Human Development Report.
- Gerson, M. (May, 2020). The Corona Virus Pandemic is developing in the Shadow of famine. The combination will be deadly. *The Washington Post*.
- Herrmann, C. (2020). *COVID-19: A Threat to peace efforts in Africa*.
- Honukpe, N. A.-I. (2020). *Africa: Elections in the time of COVID-19-What can West Africa do to prepare?* All-Africa.
- Jalloh, A. b. (9 April, 2020). *Increased Terror Attack in Africa amid Coronavirus pandemic*.
- Kellman, J. G. (20 May, 2020). National Security is too crude to Protect U.S from pandemics. Is time to shift to human security instead. *News Week*.
- Martinez-Alvarez, M. (2020). COVID-19 Pandemic in West Africa. *The Lancet Global Health*.
- Murphy, M. (21 March, 2020). Possible Implication of COVID-19 on International Peace and Security. *What's in Blue: Insight on the work of the UN Security Council?*
- Niazi, A. K. (20 April, 2020). Security Implication of Corona Virus Pandemic. *The International News*.
- Reuters, M. N. (10 April, 2020). UN Security Council meet over coronavirus as it struggles to act. *ABSCBN News*.
- Security Management: A Publication of ASIS International*.
- Situation Tracking on COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria*. (2020, April 25). Retrieved from www.Wapen.org

Siwisa, S. (22 April, 2020). The Impact of Coronavirus on sub-Saharan Africa. *OECD Development Matters*.

Stewart, P. (20 April, 2020). Public Health Threats and Pandemics. *Council on Foreign Relations*.

Tadjbakhsh, S. (2007). Human Security in International Organizations: Blessing or Scourge. *The Human Security Journal Vol. 4*.

Tarallo, M. (13 April, 2020). *COVID-19 in West Africa: A Security Management Perspective*.

Tiensin, H. (2020). *Ensuring Food Security in the era of Covid-19*. United Nations on Sustainable Development Goals.

Turse, N. (2020, March 18). In West Africa Coronavirus hotspot, war has left 700,000 homeless and expose. *The Intercept*.

UNDP (2020). *Covid-19: Looming Crisis in Developing countries threatens to devastate economies and ramp up inequality*.

Wurth, J. A. (2020). A Virtual Roundtable on COVID-19 and Human Rights Watch Researchers. *Health and Human Rights Journal*.