



FATE Philanthropy
Coalition for COVID-19
(FPCC) Support Fund

COMBATING THE IMPACT OF **COVID-19**

**ON THE LIVES AND LIVELIHOOD OF
NIGERIAN WOMEN AND OTHER
PROTECTED GROUPINGS**

SECURING LIVES



Highlights

Flattening the spike in gender-based violence (GBV) demands that to the extent manageable in the circumstance and locality, social confinements should be eased so that both men and women resume economic activities. Working outside the confines of the home is a feasible way of easing the escape valve of “the pressure cooker” into which the lockdown had transformed majority of people's domestic circumstances.

- ✍ Helping women quickly learn how to coexist with the pandemic in a manner that allows them to safely earn a living is a winner.
- ✍ Therefore, benefit transfers, cash grants, and concessionary loans are priority steps. However, the necessary suite of support does not end with benefit transfers. Majority of the women were gainfully occupied pre-COVID-19. Furthermore, the variety of roles women play in the macroeconomy span the entire value chain through their significant presence in the micro, small and medium scale enterprises (MSME). Noting that MSME is foundational to Nigeria's macroeconomy, women should be viewed as quasi-essential workers.
- ✍ As essential workers, they should be coached, reskilled, and must be kitted with personal protective equipment as part of transitioning to resilience.
- ✍ It would be unconscionable to simply toss them back into the new “wild” without some form of preparation and arrangement to provide limited support. If they are not safe, nobody is safe. Women have a wide presence in the supply chain and all of us depend on the chain.
- ✍ When many of the previously confined

women return to gainful occupation, the growth rate of GBV incidence will decline. Economically active women constitute an additional source of social support group, helping other survivors and victims of violence to overcome the trauma. For policymakers, this is a low-hanging fruit that can be harvested by literarily, conveniently teaching the needy how to fish rather than feeding them fish. The former is liberation, the latter is dependency.

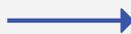
-  This approach delivers benefits rapidly and can be designed to happen cost effectively.
-  As part of the transitioning program, intervention clinics and support hubs must be reactivated. These mechanisms are auxiliary structures sustaining the core intervention — empowerment — through ensuring successful transitioning. Such arrangements lower the potential risk of regressing to cycles of escape and entrapment which can induce despondency.
-  A despondent entrepreneurial class is an impediment to economic recovery.
-  To conclude for GBV intervention, the

study recommends that while policymakers attend to the emergency and stabilization measures to secure the lives of victims and other members of this vulnerable grouping, the intervention must advance beyond the stabilization measures to embrace sustainable solutions.

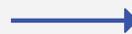
-  Regarding benefit transfers to indigenes of the Niger Delta (fuel mineral producing areas), the study finds a disheartening record of stewardship and involvement of the political class in mismanaging the preeminent institution for delivering social upliftment to this group.
-  Recent revelations about the affairs of the Niger Delta Development Commission and how its business gets done suggest that development is not on the agenda. Rather it is a confluence of deals and graft with no known strategy to address the escalating misery of its flock. In place of an emergency intervention plan, we are treated to a circus of probes and counter accusations that look like much smoke and many mirrors.

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Data



information



Knowledge

OVERVIEW

Gender-based violence (GBV) needs no dramatization. Plainly, it is disgraceful. The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

Gender based violence is perhaps one of the most widespread human-rights violations that are still tolerated socially and culturally in many countries. Although men especially adolescent boys also face violence, gender-

based violence is widely used as a synonym for violence against women to highlight the gender inequality in which much of the violence is rooted. According to World Health Organization, an estimated one third

GENDER-BASE VIOLENCE MORE COMMON THAN YOU THINK

In the Europe Union, since the age of 15:

1in3

women has experienced
**physical and/or
sexual violence**

1in20

women has been **raped**



1in2

women has experienced
sexual harassment

1in5

women has experienced
stalking

95%

of victims **trafficked**
for **exual exploitation** in the EU are women

of all women and girls world-wide have been exposed to violence of some kind at least once during their lifetime. Depending on the countries, it has been estimated that between 20 and 30 per cent of women have experienced domestic violence in their lives; implicitly that up to 1.5 billion women are affected by this scourge every year. Though relatively high, this number may still be grossly underestimated because majority of the cases of violence against women are unreported.

Undoubtedly, this grim statistic has been with us long before COVID-19 pandemic struck. It is quite conceivable that COVID-19 may have introduced new dimensions to the nature of GBV. For instance, taking the act beyond violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women in both their public and private life. Another possibility is that it may have introduced other hitherto unknown consequences beyond the suffering of physical (including sexual) and psychological harm. So far and based on publicly available information, we are yet to see a clear piece of evidence that either the pandemic or the fallouts from its mitigation measures have introduced one or more novel dimensions to domestic violence.

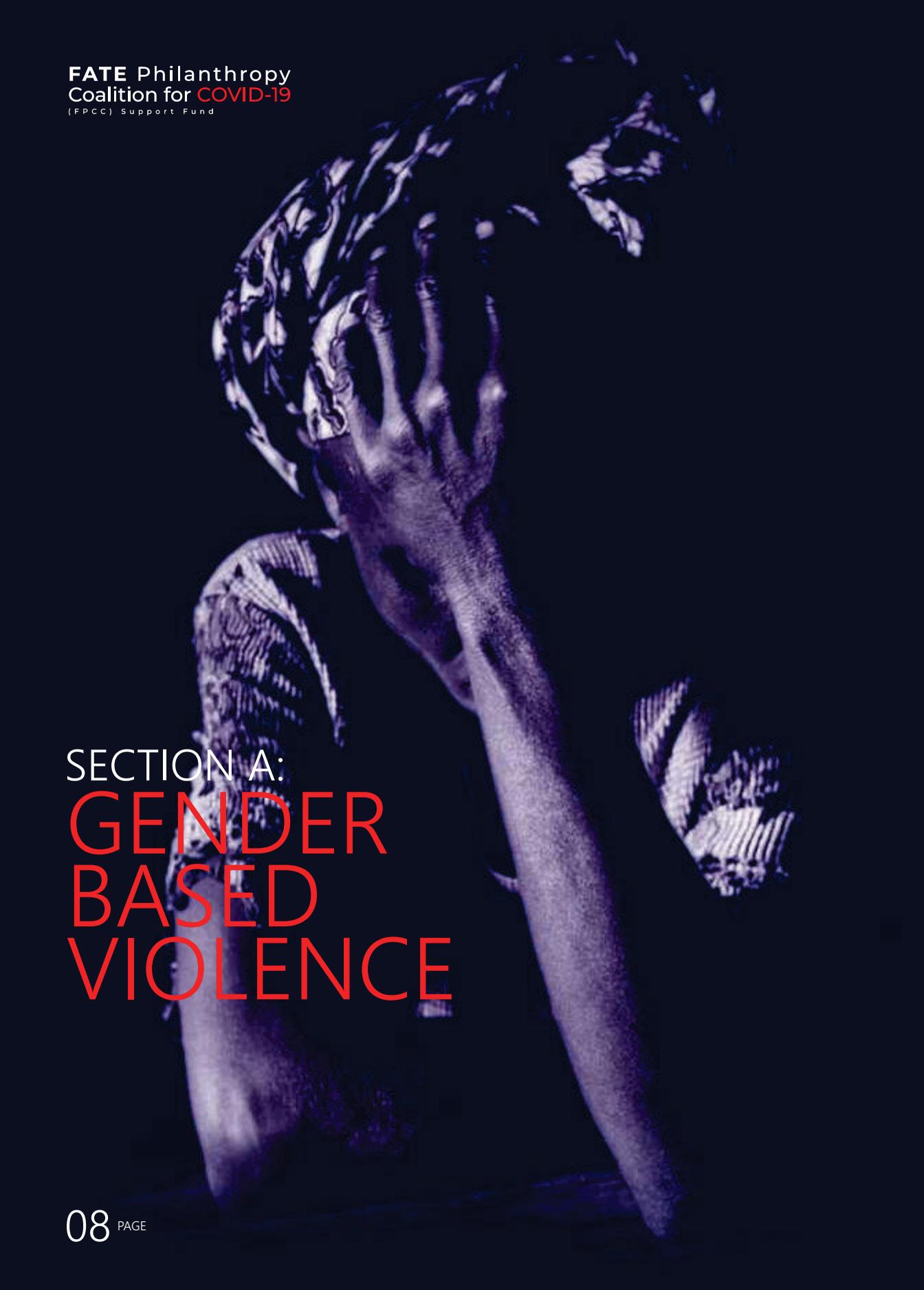
Therefore, in this brief, we confine our analysis to (a) promoting a better understanding of how the pandemic may have aggravated the typical drivers of GBV

Depending on the countries, it has been estimated that between 20 and 30 per cent of women have experienced domestic violence in their lives; implicitly that up to 1.5 billion women are affected by this scourge every year.

or other related causal factors of domestic violence, and (b) to identifying plausible and effective response measures. A useful contribution for policymaking would be to suggest ways and means of getting appropriate countervailing measures to become substantive elements of the COVID-19 adaptation and responsive components. For the GBV mitigation measures to render effectively, their implementation must become part of the key performance indicators or benchmarks against which the performance of those charged with prosecuting the pandemic in Nigeria are evaluated. Anything short of this mechanism renders the policy a palliative, a mere gesture of goodwill. Such an outcome or tinkering around the edges would be rather unfortunate because gender inequality is too crucial an issue to be relegated. It would be especially troubling to do so in a society which has begun to proclaim health and education for productivity, diversification, and robust employment prospects. The value proposition in ending gender-based violence is too generous for any society and more so, Nigeria, not to stop and act.

In closing, we shall consider briefly the case of another protected group whose vulnerabilities are mitigated through benefit sharing scheme and for whom the oil and gas revenue crunch, complicated by the parallel freeze in other auxiliary income sources is dire. In the beginning of the trilogy, we were apprehensive that the real danger for this grouping is less of the

pandemic but more of the risk that whatever trickle is coming down the pipe will now be sucked up by the elites in those vulnerable communities, a concern that has been validated in the recent drama over stewardship of the Niger Delta Development Corporation (NDDC), the canonical benefit-sharing institution supporting the livelihood of these vulnerable communities.

A person is shown from the chest up, their face completely obscured by their hands. They are wearing a patterned, short-sleeved shirt. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows and highlights that emphasize the texture of the fabric and the skin. The overall color palette is dark, dominated by blues and blacks, with a touch of red in the text.

SECTION A:
**GENDER
BASED
VIOLENCE**

GBV IN COVID-19-NIGERIA

The Phenomenon

Scholarship on gender violence finds that social settings of victims and perpetrators influence the different manifestations of GBV. On 30 March 2020, Nigeria experienced a change in its social settings which was unlike anything it has ever experienced in its history except for those that lived through the Nigerian civil war in the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria. In his first and most prominent broad combat measure against the pandemic, President Buhari froze social and economic interactions by ordering the lockdown of major urban centers covering the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja (FCT), Lagos State and the neighboring Ogun State which together with Lagos constitutes Africa's largest urban conurbation. A gradual easing of the lockdown in the Lagos State environs and the FCT started 4 May 2020. One of the most serious collateral damages from both the lockdown and its ripples is GBV. Furthermore, these damages are complicated by the fact that except for the immediate victims of gender violence, the pain and anxieties of the pandemic and its

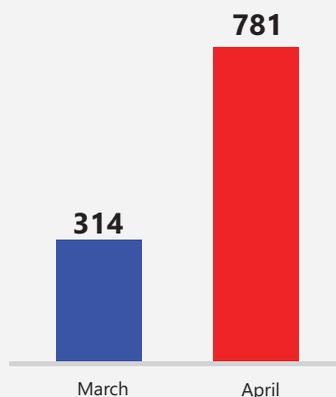
social stigma tended to numb people's consciousness about the dangers of the escalating GBV. In effect, becoming the shadow epidemic. The world will never know the true casualty figures from this parallel scourge that long predated and will surely outlast the pandemic.

The lockdown was a double jeopardy in that it weakened the traditional mitigating factors such as the ability of law enforcement, social workers, and neighbors (society at large) to respond to physical and psychological traumas whilst escalating aggravating factors such as wealth inequalities and cultural enclaves within which victims can feel trapped, with now severely limited options to respond to hostile circumstances. The first direct impact of the lockdown is a radical change in domestic circumstances. The principal care providers who invariably are women now confront with immediate effect, restless children out of school, who find themselves in an extended experience of a totally alien origin that parents are equally unable to explain away satisfactorily. Confined indoors at home and isolated from their other

important lifestyle of school, parents grapple with mitigating the potential emotional impact on the children. The women must additionally be concerned with their partners too, as well as contend with the complication of husbands now having to remain at home, perhaps unable to provide for the family at the accustomed level and also apprehensive about future income prospects. Surely, the tension must be palpable. Further complicate that with power relationships and dynamics of women trying to assert control over their sexuality and reproductive rights while managing the resulting extra domestic demands in an increasingly tense atmosphere. No clubs, no soccer, no social engagements. No more of the customary distractions that were at least previously available for those who could afford it. For those who could not afford spending on social activities, their self-fashioned affordable alternative outlets, crude as they may be, are equally foreclosed. The dire consequences of this situational configuration for women is unmistakable.

The scenario described above is not exclusive to women in a relationship or formal marriage. Single women, heads of household, and others living with partners are impacted as well, broadly through the temporary foreclosure of expanding opportunities to gainful employment, access to, and control of financial resources. Given pre-existing gender inequalities, these

INCREASE IN TOTAL CASES ACROSS 23 STATES IN NIGERIA



Notes: Author's visualization based on data from UN Women, 2020. "Gender based violence in Nigeria during the COVID-19 crisis: The Shadow Pandemic"

Figure 1: The National Profile in Summary

desperate times that lead to desperate measures generally leave women with disproportionately bad choices. Some of these bad choices include increases in varieties of sexual violence, economic violence and emotional violence. Varieties of the emotional violence are rooted in economic violence. For instance, levirate marriage imposes emotional violence when women are forced into marriages by in laws and family members who disinherit these widows by confiscating the estate of the deceased husband. Increasing death toll during the pandemic may in some areas exacerbate this phenomenon. This complex typology combining physical, psychological

INCREASE IN NUMBER OF CASES PER GEOPOLITICAL ZONE

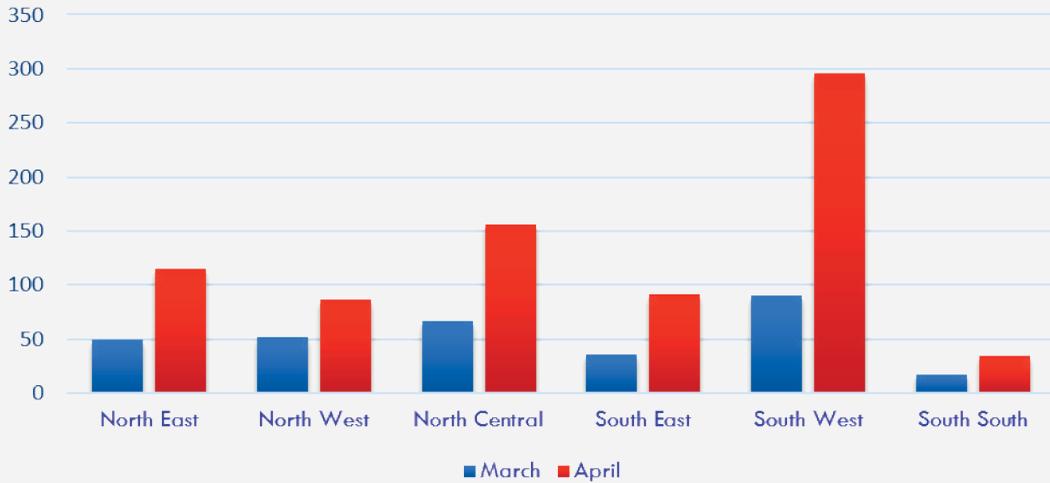


Figure 1: The National Profile in Summary

and economic types of violence become pervasive when victims are simultaneously placed in tight proximity over extended periods with perpetrators whilst separated from mitigating factors such as social networks. They manifest as verbal aggression which mostly go unreported and hence remains hidden, pseudo-ostracism by confinement in an already isolated and thus confining environment (double marginalization), intimidation and denigration, constant humiliation, coerced sex, denial of food and other basic necessities, sometimes as part of the humiliation, rise in transactional sex due to lowered threshold of resistance from limited

economic opportunities, and female trafficking that possibly extend to pedophilia.

Data from a recent study of this phenomenon by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) show a significant escalation of GBV incidence across the country. Although higher rates of increase are recorded in the Southern political zones (South East, South West and South-South) it is not clear that the numbers are not driven by reporting features. If victims located in the Southern states have a stronger tendency to report cases of gender violence, that feature can influence the

INCREASE IN CASES
IN STATES WITH TOTAL
LOCKDOWN

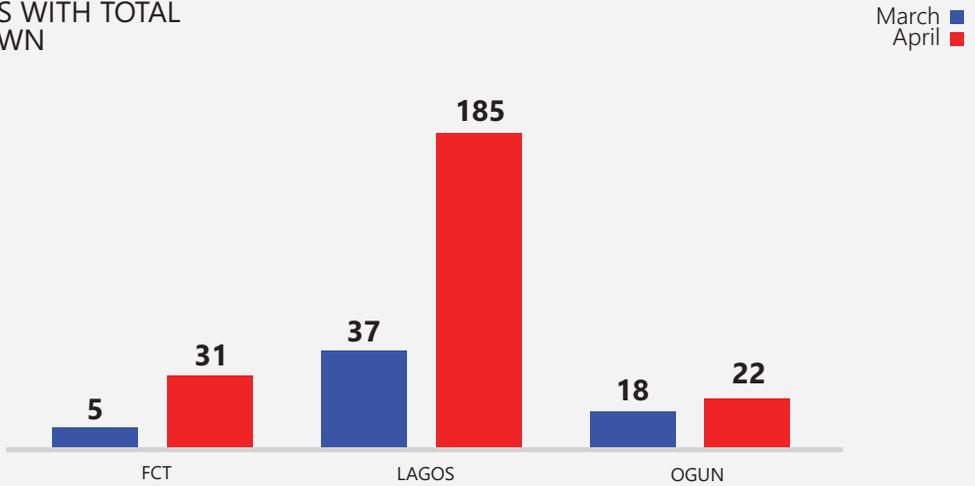


Figure 3:
Lockdown & GBV

TRENDS IN
NUMBER OF CASES
PER STATE

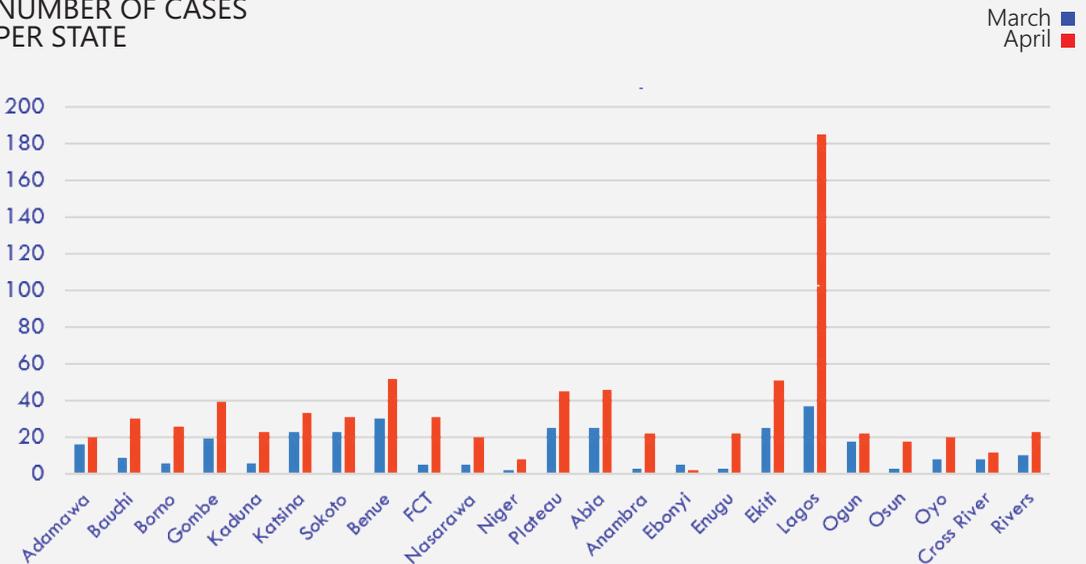


Figure 4: GBV
Incidence across States

Single women, heads of household, and others living with partners are impacted as well, broadly through the temporary foreclosure of expanding opportunities to gainful employment, access to, and control of financial resources.

records. Therefore, without controlling for this bias, inferences based on the reported figures must be circumspective.

If the data are credible, over six-fold increases (the highest rates nationwide) were reported for Anambra State and Enugu State (633%) whereas five-fold increases were reported for Osun State (500%) and FCT (520%). In absolute numbers, the highest number of cases in any state nationwide was recorded in Lagos State but that figure represents a 400 percent growth, higher than any growth rate in the Northern States except for the Federal Capital Territory. But FCT although located in the Northern geopolitical zone is atypical in clearly being more cosmopolitan than any other jurisdiction in the North. States in the three clusters of Southern geopolitical zones recorded the highest number of increases in gender violence (225%, 155%, 150%) by comparison to the equally three clusters of Northern States with 132%, 130%, and 67%. It is quite possible that the disparity in the growth rates is underpinned by cultural

norms and institutionalized attitudes towards GBV. On the latter, the general absence of police presence in these communities makes the cost of seeking justice more burdensome to the victim than living with the abuse.

Also, the profile of the offenses is salient. Where many of the offenses are by people known to the victim such as spouses or intimate partners, the victims feel constrained to “contain” the situation instead of making a formal report to the authorities. On the other hand, masculinity in the African context is often linked to ability to meet financial obligations by the family breadwinner. Therefore, in a relationship where the woman is financially independent, or the man has been economically emasculated such as has happened with the wealth consequences of the pandemic, men may resort to violence to assert masculinity. Although by no means an assertion that Southern men are more machismo than Northerners, it can be argued that ethnically, Southern cultural presentations pander to more material trappings. If so, could the higher incidences of violence observed in the South be perverse manifestations of this cultural orientation? Deprived of customary economic power but in constant close quarters with family members who now serve as regular reminders of this temporary inadequacy, do these beings act out their frustrations on defenseless victims? Finally,

we should note that all the reported statistics were for incidences within the first one month of the lockdown. It will be instructive to conduct another survey to ascertain the trend in the incidence before a conclusive statement can be meaningfully made about the impact of COVID-19 on GBV.

Response Measures

What to do during and after the pandemic? The first prize of course is to end the pandemic thus eliminating a continuing aggravating factor. However, because the endpoint of the pandemic remains uncertain, Nigeria has started learning to coexist with the pandemic. Therefore, it has become equally important to consider GBV response measures that mitigate the set of aggravating factors stemming from COVID-19. In this regard, economic empowerment of women easily comes to mind, much like the recommendation for the support of MSME (micro, small and medium scale enterprises). Whereas MSME are the umbilical cord of the macroeconomy, women are the life support or umbilical cord of the microeconomy. They are foundational (socioeconomically) to both the Nigerian household and its economy. Therefore, to keep the GBV response measures front stage and thus ensure that in the heat of the pandemic combat measures, this agenda item is not relegated, we strongly

recommend that all mandated GBV response measures be integrated into the job performance assessment for public officials in charge of managing the pandemic.

On the list of what to do about GBV during the pandemic, here is a very low-hanging fruit for policymakers. In jurisdictions where Family and Support Units are in existence but have been stretched thin and thus ineffectual, such workforce should be refurbished by recalling them from other pandemic related duties. As essential frontline workers, they must then be provided with personal protective gears and other resources required to effectively respond to calls for assistance from victims and survivors of gender-based violence. Whether they are the police, trained social workers or auxiliary health workers, these crucial GBV response teams must as a matter of continuing urgency be enabled to reactivate shelters and service points beyond pre-COVID-19 operable capacities. Such a measure helps to accommodate the known spike known in incidents and anticipate the worst while hoping for the best. In fact, the rise in gender-based violence in Nigeria has been acknowledged by women advocacy groups who came together to reprimand the government for not doing enough to ensure that victims have access to help during the lockdown. Their major advocacy point was for the “establishment of gender desks and family

support units with hot lines within police departments and other government departments at federal and state levels to facilitate access to immediate help by women who may need it.”

In addition to establishing help desks, innovative ways of processing and caring for victims of GBV must be implemented to tackle the additional strain created by COVID-19. For instance, in South Africa, in the first week of the lockdown, the police received more than 87,000 gender-based complaints. During lockdown, the legal support structures for domestic violence and protection in South Africa remained operational, with the Gender-Based Violence National Command Centre continuing work. Still, helplines were overwhelmed by the increased number of calls for help and advice. Providing redress and protection to victims also became more difficult due to a lack of resources, both human and material as well as COVID-19 related safety concerns.

Civil society organizations are additional sources of support in ensuring that victims of GBV in Nigeria receive attention. Organizations such as Spaces for Change and Help Initiative include as part of their focus areas the campaign for women's rights/empowerment and could be relevant for intervention measures. Population Council of Nigeria, whose major focus areas include family planning, reproductive health, women empowerment and HIV prevention

can mobilize by interfacing its network span with government institutions and other civil society actors to organize a coordinated approach towards ensuring that GBV victims get help and access to justice timeously. Also, the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN) could leverage their network of several Muslim organizations to facilitate intervention measures especially where it is considered that tackling the scourge from a sociocultural perspective in consonance with religious injunctions is most beneficial.

Living with Injustice

Because the fight against GBV is happening now and will continue post-COVID-19, we consider it potentially useful to briefly explore pathways to a fundamental solution to the problem. So, we begin by asking who gains from gender-based violence and what are those gains? Simply, what are the incentives to indulge in such egregious conduct?

Few people, if any, would openly admit freely to profiting from other people's misery or by inflicting misery on others even when they clearly indulge in it. We are yet to see a plethora of self-declared racists and misogynists. Consider the Ku Klux Klan and the Nazis and find that even at such high organizational level, their dark intentions are laced in idealistic tones and sold as a matter

of right in the eyes of the beholder. Besides, members of such vile organizations hide behind corporate or organizational veil to perpetrate their hateful ends. Therefore, opinions about the motives for GBV remain speculative. But what about countervailing cost considerations? Whatever maybe the benefits of engaging in violence against women, there is little doubt that lowering the cost of such behavior raises the incentive for the perpetrators. According to the scholarship on gender violence, when victims feel imprisoned to their circumstances with little or no options, they tend to adapt by rationalizing the situation. As a coping mechanism, it nonetheless encourages rather than deters perpetrators. Again, this highlights the importance of economic empowerment and addressing the root problem of gender inequality.

Traditional law enforcement instruments have so far proven inadequate even in industrialized economies. In Nigeria, we can begin our analysis with the nature of the criminal justice system including the perception of the police force charged with preventing, protecting, investigating the crime, and enforcing the law. First, seeking remedy through the criminal justice system is an expensive endeavor at best, but even more daunting for victims coming from a position of considerable power disadvantage be that economic, political or both. Second, the Nigeria Police Force is not favorably regarded by the public whom it serves. To

that, add community leaders who intentionally or otherwise undermine what rudimentary formal process exists through habitually counteracting victims' formal moves. This counteraction takes the form of rapidly intervening to plead for out-of-court settlement in favor of traditional mediation. Such interventions whether intentional or unwittingly, constitute an additional source of pressure on survivors to comply or face a potentially up-scalable hostile environment. The habit is an additional source of pressure to survivors. It signals a clear message to the survivors that there is no succor outside the confines of tradition because keepers of the tradition are ubiquitous in their reach. Without countervailing support, the cumulative effects of these various tactics within cultural enclaves can be overwhelming to the survivors. Also, it serves to keep potential victims subservient. This summarizes the institutional underpinnings of GBV persistence locally. For survivors who are already under trauma, prospects of additional stress are likely to force the choice of a response in a predictable direction—to conform out of weariness.

Fourth, women chose not to pursue prosecution by not even reporting the abuse because of the social stigma that can attach to such unwelcome publicity. Discreetly reaching a resolution among families of the parties is preferred because this approach tends to minimize shame and



foreseeable collateral damages. An example of such collateral damages would be reduced ineligibility for getting married by reason of having been defiled. Fifth, another example would be emotional pain from a feeling of reduced self-worth. Personal sacrifices and extreme endurance by survivors to gain or maintain social standing is encouraged. In some cultures, paying such prices to attract or retain husbands is regarded as an overriding goal. In some places, husbands, partners and even family members have been known to blame victims or imply a certain level of complicity or contributory negligence to the crime. Boys can play rough and tumble yet when hurt, they enjoy compassion, but girls cannot go out on a date and not be blamed for not expecting to be abused or violated? Sixth, in other environments, GBV is altogether regarded as a trivial matter thus leading victims to internalize the trauma since there is little reasonable basis for expecting external post-trauma support.

Clearly, the articulation between the formal and informal rules within the society as well as the nature of the enforcement mechanism, as we have outlined, altogether portray an enabling landscape for gender-based violence. These glaring imbalances in the war against GBV and the glaring inadequacies uncovered by the compounding effect of COVID-19 should lead to a fervent search for additional ways of promoting deterrence. Forcing

perpetrators to bear as much of the costs as can be levied can be influential in redirecting their minds to the broader consequences of their behavior. On the one hand, identifying those cost elements which must necessarily decrease to enable victims whilst escalating the cost elements that dissuade perps. On the other hand, successfully imposing the escalated cost elements on the perpetrators. In conclusion, we recommend that while policymakers attend to the emergency and stabilization measures to secure the lives of victims and other members of this vulnerable grouping, the intervention must advance beyond the stabilization measures to embrace sustainable solutions.

The NDDC ...
received over N5 trillion
in the last 19 years,
with no physical project
on ground to justify the
huge funds and wondered
why the lawmakers decided
to probe five months [of]
activities ...

Godswill Akpabio

SECTION B:
BENEFIT
TRANSFERS

PROTECTING VULNERABLE GROUPINGS IN OIL PRODUCING COMMUNITIES

Background

Benefits transfers refer to the transfer of the gains of oil and gas production to citizens, especially those in oil producing communities. The transfer mechanisms range from statutory provisions to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities of oil and gas producing firms. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established by the Niger Delta Development Commission establishment Act, 2000 as one of the major benefit transfer mechanisms to ensure that host communities of oil and gas production in the Niger-Delta region of the country enjoy the benefits of oil and gas production. Another key benefit transfer mechanism is known as the 13% derivation principle. In simple terms, a state in which oil and gas resources are produced is entitled to 13% of the value of production from within its territory. This is given by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) from the proceeds of crude oil sales to the relevant state governments. In turn the state governments are expected to utilize the

funds for the benefit of their citizens. Although it is difficult to track the use of public funds received by a state through the 13% derivation principle, several agitations sometimes violent by host community groups in the Niger-Delta area suggest that the funds are not being properly applied to improve the welfare of those communities. These abiding agitations owing to neglect of the needs of host communities by the federal and state governments as well as the oil producing firms led to the creation of the NDDC. The commission was tasked with addressing the needs of host communities at the grass-root level.

The primary functions of the commission include the formulation of policies and guidelines for the sustainable development of the Niger Delta area including the conception, planning and implementing of projects and programs in the area of transportation, health, education, employment, industrialization, agriculture and fisheries, housing and urban development, water supply, electricity and telecommunications. Major funding sources

for the NDDC comprise (a) 15 percent of the total monthly statutory allocation due to member states of the commission from the federation account (b) 3 percent of the total annual budget of any oil and gas producing company operating on shore and off shore in the Niger-Delta area (c) 50 percent of monies due to member states of the commission from the ecological fund. Other sources of funding include grants, loans, gifts, aid, and proceeds from other assets that may accrue to the commission.

According to a five-year review of revenues, deductions, disbursements and application of funds by the NDDC from 2007 to 2011, the commission received NGN 216.9 billion in allocation from the federal government accounting for 36.5% of the commission revenue over the review period. Oil company receipts to the commission amounted to NGN 375.6 billion representing 63.3% of the commission's revenue. No doubt, money was flowing in, but its application remained dubious. Then unexpectedly in the first quarter of 2020, an oil price shock struck in conjunction with global economic downturn. The global economic meltdown was a direct consequence of the draconian measures taken to contain the rage of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a series of reinforcing vicious cycle, these shocks triggered an outcome in the oil and gas industry that can best be described as unprecedented.

Circumstances

Crude oil demand and prices crashed to its lowest level in 22 years while the West Texas Intermediate benchmark turned negative, an unprecedented economic event of incredible absurdity. That is how bleak the times had suddenly become. On its part, the Federal Government of Nigeria reviewed its 2020 fiscal projections and lowered its revenue parameters by adjusting the oil benchmark price used for budgeting from \$57 to \$30 per barrel. Crude oil production estimates were also lowered from approximately 2.2 million to 1.7 million barrels per day. Evidently, projected revenue from oil and gas production, Nigeria's main source of revenue is jeopardized. Likewise, the fortune of oil and gas producing companies operating in the country. Altogether these events imply a reduction in expected revenue, and by extension, a significant reduction in benefit transfers to host communities. Consequently, activities of the NDDC as well as CSR efforts of oil and gas companies may be limited in the near-term or at least till the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are overcome.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to establish when that will be. While projections estimate that the global economy may begin to recover from the second half of 2021, it is predicated on the available data that effects of the pandemic may begin to ease from the second half of 2020 as countries begin to lift

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restrictions and open up their economies. However, according to the World Bank, if the pandemic lingers longer than expected or if there is a major second outbreak, the recovery period could be extended. In addition, the initial estimate of 5.2 percent for global economic contraction may worsen to 8 percent.



Outcome

Despite the bleak outlook, COVID-19 may not be the biggest threat to benefit transfers to the Niger Delta. Following a forensic audit of the activities of the NDDC at the request of the President, and a probe into an NDDC 40 billion-naira scandal by the National Assembly, misappropriation of funds and extra budgetary expenditure by the Commission were uncovered. Additionally, allegations of award of contracts under questionable circumstances such as violation of rules against conflicts of interests were unraveled. Ironically, past and present members of the National assembly, especially those in oversight committees of the Commission or indigenes of the Niger Delta region have been identified as recipients of such contracts. If these allegations against the National Assembly prove true, it is doubtful that the irregularities surrounding the activities of the NDDC would be comprehensively pursued to a proper conclusion by the lawmakers.

Following a three-month probe over the misappropriation of NGN 40 billion, the Senate, in July 2020, ordered the NDDC management to refund about 5 billion naira to the NDDC account. According to the investigating committee, the refund was for illegal payments to staff and contractors in breach of the procurement rules. Details of the refund included overseas travel to the United Kingdom worth NGN85.7million,



scholarship grants worth NGN105.5 million, union members' trip to Italy worth NGN164.2 million, payment made for Lassa fever kit worth NGN1.96 billion, payment for public communication valued at NGN1.12 billion, and COVID-19 fund expenditure worth NGN1.49 billion. Additional recommendations by the committee include, that the NDDC management be dissolved and a new board set up, the on-going forensic audit of the NDDC be transferred to the Office of the Auditor General of the Federation, and a review of the NDDC projects be conducted to test for correlation between development in region and the funds invested in the zone. There is however, yet to be a resolution by the National Assembly regarding their members



who allegedly received NDDC contracts. This is despite a formal correspondence between the Ministry of the Niger Delta Affairs and the National Assembly identifying the recipients of the contracts.

According to news reports, the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs who as a result of an administrative restructuring by the President, began oversight of the NDDC in February 2020, described the Commission as a corruption [cesspool] which he likened to "... an ATM for people to come and collect money to contest next election." In a seemingly you accuse me-and-I respond in equal measure strategy, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in August 2020 reportedly disclosed that it has

commenced investigations into the allegations against the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, and the acting Managing Director of the NDDC (supposedly the new cleanup crew). Thus, the absurdity nonetheless continues amidst such mammoth socioeconomic challenges as now confront the world. Challenges that clearly hold dire consequence for the Niger Delta people. It is troubling that such long running egregious conduct is ratcheting precisely when such follies and banalities should be stepped down. If current global circumstances of this exceptionality cannot cause the Nigerian leadership to reconsider and change, what then would it take?

CLOSING REMARKS

Part 3 concludes the trilogy that began with Saving Lives, the first part which focuses on combating and containing the spread of SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The second part of the series examined ways and means of Safeguarding Livelihood so that economic misery would not doom those lucky enough to escape the pandemic, or those who by sheer discipline and tenacity hunkered down to reduce the risk of infection to others. Part 2 also highlighted the question of providing for the poor and vulnerable but essential workers who risk their lives daily on our streets and byways for others to stay safe and fed? In this concluding part, we highlight the plight of the shadow groupings who confront not the double jeopardy of health and economics, but the trilemma of health, economics, and inhumanity.

By our effort, we hope to have sensitized readers to the enormity of the challenges unleashed on our society by the pandemic, and to the direct test of our humanity in the personal space, including the attendant social sacrifice that we have had to endure continuously. Furthermore, it exhorts us to

be mindful of the consequences of our choices on the health and safety of others. In learning to coexist with the pandemic, it tests our endurance. However, by far the most distressing aspect of the study is to finally ponder the nature of the silver linings that our leadership will see in this uniquely painful global circumstance. Governance and leadership are arguably Nigeria's most deficient dimensions with obviously dire consequences for our collective wellbeing. If by this suffering, we reform, then we can boldly look to stepping down the immiseration meter that has been shifting majority of Nigerians into poverty enclaves amidst generous natural resource endowments, like standing in the stream but having to wash hands with spittle.

There is little cause for optimism right now because (1) although by no means at the same level with COVID-19 pandemic, the global economic downturn in 2011 did not trigger diversification of economic activities. (2) A pessimistic but realistic view would argue that if history is any guide, not much will change in the manner of governance. Salient past experiences have not induced

positive behavior modifications. If anything, we are led to say “plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.” In the last two decades, Nigerians have endured the death of two serving Presidents due to ill health and is grappling with another incumbency in poor health. Wealthy Nigerians engage in expensive medical tourism. Yet the leadership and political establishment have not become Pro Health! Investment in health and human services is abysmal as is the attention to reproductive health and population control. How else can we realistically improve living standards if our demographics (total fertility rate) is out of control? What national planning?

Additionally, Pandemics are “democratizing” experiences because they afflict both the wealthy and the destitute, the young and the old, all races, creed, and religions. Would we develop a Public Consciousness

that allows us next time to Be better Prepared for disasters that are national in scope? The Ebola experience has not transformed “Yaba” (the author's metaphor for infectious disease control combat readiness) nor did the death of our Ebola heroine, Dr. Stella Ameyo Adadevoh, usher a socially inclusive and progressive mindset in the leadership. It is reasonable to boldly state that the change we want must come from the people and not from the leadership, particularly where it appears that they (the leadership) find the status quo beneficial. Why change? They appear to have no compelling reason to effect a change. Hence, the legal luminary Femi Falana has urged that the people must both champion and own the change they want. That must be the canonical takeaway from the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the lives and livelihood of Nigerians.

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