

Pandemic within Pandemics: Racism, Hunger, and Insecurity in Africa

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Abstract

The paper reveals that strengthening the social protection system is an essential prerequisite for increasing the resilience of populations against COVID-19, racism, hunger and insecurity. Basic social safety net programmes designed to fight poverty and chronic vulnerability must therefore be popularised on a larger scale and be more targeted. At the continental level, covid-19 racism has manifested mostly as the articulation of scepticism and condescension by the West against Africa and Africans in a fashion that blurs the artificial geographic fissures between North and African countries. The pandemic has had a direct and indirect impact on the protection situation of the most vulnerable populations and an exacerbation of the number of people with nutritional deficiencies. With COVID, populations face a physical (closure of markets, disruption of distribution chains, etc.) and/or financial (loss of income, rise in food prices) inability to access healthy and diverse food. Vulnerable populations are more affected in terms of access because they are more dependent on the market for their supplies to meet food and nutritional needs. Security forces, including police and the army, were deployed to enforce the restrictions, sparking deadly confrontations in some parts of Africa. The restrictions of movement during the COVID-19 resulted in the upsurge in cases of rape and other sexual and gender-based violence in

Nigeria. It emphasized further that, while it has become crucial for governments to enforce lockdown measures during the pandemic, the rights of citizens must be guaranteed in accordance with national laws and international human rights conventions. Insecurity involved extra-judicial killings, Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency, cult-related clashes and farmers-herdsmen clashes. Many security personnel were also lost to the pandemic and terrorist attacks. Security forces should be more proactive in taming the scourge of terrorism, banditry and kidnappings that has threatened many vulnerable communities. Conflict resolution processes and peacekeeping should be re-prioritised in order to achieve sustainable development. To this end, different official documents, research articles, archives, and other online reportages related to COVID-19, racism, hunger, and insecurity in Africa were reviewed to achieve the objective of this paper. Priority must be given to actions that would ensure renaissance, recovery and resilience in post-coronavirus era.

Keywords: Pandemic, racism, hunger, insecurity, recovery and resilience

Introduction

Racism, hunger, and insecurity have been amplified COVID-19 pandemic globally (Elbaum, 2020). As nations grapple with measures to defeat the pandemic, many other issues of concern are being precipitated. These issues include racism, hunger, and insecurity which, of course, became pronounced during the lockdown measures adopted by many countries across the world. While issues of racism became more visible in America and other developed countries (where cases of White supremacy abound) (Elbaum, 2020), hunger and insecurity are known to be peculiar to developing countries. Therefore, this study is designed to holistically review the impact of COVID-19 on racism, hunger, and insecurity in Africa. The SDG 2 is targeted on ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture by 2030. The first subsection (SDG2.1) states that by 2030 nations should end hunger and ensure access by all people, particularly the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round. Nevertheless, developing countries are faced with extreme hunger

that are often caused or compounded by bad governance, conflicts and climate change (Otekunrin *et al*, 2020).

However, reports show that, hunger has been on the increase in almost all sub-regions of Africa, which already precipitated prevalence of malnutrition up to a level of 22.8% in Sub-Africa and, to a lesser extent in Latin America (5.7%) and Southeast Asia (9.2%) in 2018 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2019). It has been documented that more than two billion people, mainly in low- and middle-income countries do not have regular access to nutritious and sufficient food (Ribeiro-Silva *et al*, 2020). Also, random access is noted to be a challenge for high-income countries, for example, 8% of North America and Europe are affected (Ribeiro-Silva *et al*, 2020). Availability of food notwithstanding, many individuals still suffer inequality in access, especially access to healthy diets (FAO, 2020), which has a high tendency to increase the number of people vulnerable to hunger in the face of COVID-19. In the year 2018, over 821 million people, 1 in 9 people, suffered from hunger globally. New estimates show that more than 130 million people can enter this category by the end of 2020 (UNICEF, 2020). In addition, the pandemic is also estimated to lead 49 million people to extreme poverty in 2020 (WFP, 2020), accentuating the immense challenge of reaching the Zero Hunger goal by 2030 (Ribeiro-Silva *et al*, 2020), including the Africa Agenda 2063.

In addition, sustainable development cannot be realised without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development. The SDG 16 recognizes the need to: (1) build peaceful and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice. (2) Be based on respect for human rights (including the right to development), effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and (3) on transparent, effective and accountable institutions. Factors which give rise to violence, insecurity and injustice, such as inequality, corruption, poor governance and illicit financial and arms flows, are addressed by the goal 16. While it is a recommendation to redouble efforts to resolve or prevent conflict and to support post conflict countries, COVID-19 has created a setback to achieving the goal.

To this end, different official documents, research articles, and other online reportages related to COVID-19, racism, hunger, and insecurity in Africa were reviewed to achieve the objective of this paper. Priority was given to actions that would ensure recovery and resilience in post-coronavirus era.

Racism

Coming to grips with racism in the era of a pandemic such as covid-19 underscores the globality of human fragility. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the inveterateness of the phenomenon in history as a cumulative reality. Such understanding facilitates a profound cognition about how the current dynamics of racism are evocative of global history in the past five centuries. Within this period, the racism of White Europe has taken an evolutionary dimension through which it has subtended the rest of human races.

In accounting for the enormity of White racism on the rest of the world, it is necessary to state that Africa, especially Black Africa, has been worst hit, being at the receiving end of the most demeaning of all treatments, beginning with the Atlantic Slavery (Yusoff, 2018). The disciplinary complicity of White racism against Africa has received critical attention in postcolonial scholarship (Thomas, 2013). Besides the textual practice that attempts a justification of the long temporal stretch of the Atlantic Slavery in which Africa lost both its human natural resources, colonialism served as the continuation of the order in a rather subtle form to extenuate the enormity of the racism against Africans. Striding the temporal stretch, one cannot but recall the complicity of Western philosophy represented by the racist assumptions of Friedrich Nietzsche, among others about the barbarism of Africans and the rationalization of slavery and colonialism against them (Bernasconi, 2017).

Besides, the widely held view about the culpability of Anthropology in the discourse of White racism against Africa, Yusoff (2018: xiv) notion of "A billion Black Anthropocenes" pointedly underscores another instance of disciplinary racism in what she terms "White Geology". This is precisely because of the blurring of the line between the human and the inhuman, making it possible to extract humans as slaves the same way gold was extracted and taken to the West. Such analogical insight draws attention to the seriousness of racism and how it succeeded in the forced migration and scattering of Africans into what is generally today referred to as the far-flung African Diaspora. The remnant of human and natural resources on the continent in the post-colonial era has been subjected to all forms of imperialist strategies from the West. The pattern continues to substantially

explain why the struggle to break with the shackles of racism in Africa is an enduring challenge that Africa continues to deal with rather spindly.

A diachronic approach, such as the above, to the understanding of racism in relation to Africa, resonates with what Kwok (2020) has termed Covid-19 anti-racism and the necessity of “a postcolonial perspective on pandemic politics”. Invariably, coming to terms with racism and how it has affected Africa in the era of covid-19 must take into account an insight that is both continental and supra-continental. Beginning with the latter, the challenge of racism faced by people of African and Black descent the world over during covid-19 is of extreme importance, considering that since 2003 the Diaspora has officially sat in the imagination of the continent as Africa’s sixth region as declared by the African Union (AU). The influential journal *The Black Scholar* has recently published a special edition on “Voices of Black Girls in Sister Mentors on COVID-19 and Racism” to explore the various dimensions of gender and racial discrimination suffered in the United States of America. This is instructive because the special issue reinforces the precipitation of racism against Blacks in during covid-19 and the double jeopardy of Black women.

At another level, work and social relations in the pandemic era have revealed a certain level of peculiar vulnerability of people of African and Black descent in the Diaspora, despite the claim that the pandemic has compelled a review of structures and systems that sustain racism to make workplace relations more antiracist (Frey, 2020). The issues underscore the invocation of the structural insider-outsider dyad of relations across the globe that has made both racism and the pandemic dangerously adumbrating realities (Klingberg, 2020).

At the continental level, covid-19 racism has manifested mostly as the articulation of animadversions, skepticism and condescension by the West against Africa and Africans in a fashion that blurs the artificial geographic fissures between North and Sub-Saharan Africa. It began with the apocalyptic prognosis of Melinda Gates whose corky certitude about the inevitability of mass African morbidity sent jitters down the spines of many on the continent (Okereke and Nielsen, 2020). Reckoning that the level of death and infection in the Global North had claimed thousands at the inception of the pandemic, despite otherwise sophisticated medical facilities and healthcare system, Gates in her conceited assumption simply nominated the entire African continent as the potentially worst off,

projecting that Africans—from Cape to Cairo-- were bound to die in their millions. Although the projections were based on the actualities of Africa's medical challenges, the innuendoes of racism in the projections are apparent.

Related to such assumption is the cynicism that greeted the herbal response to the outbreak of the pandemic on the continent. The popularity of indigenous herbal remedies, especially in Africa goes against the grains of Western medicine, but the outcome has proven its efficacy, knowing for instance, that the high survival rate of the pandemic in a country like Nigeria, obtains essentially from herbal treatments at home, rather than at the authorized covid-19 approved isolation and treatment centres. Emergent data continues to prove the point about the transitional state of African societies, as many people in different parts of the continent are disposed to adopting herbal protocols in the treatment of covid-19 (Iwuoha *et al*, 2020). The derision and condescension that greeted the Malagasy covid-19 herbal cure is another instance of the intersection of covid-19 and racism, considering attempts by the West to summarily dismiss the efforts as unscientific.

As Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, observed, such assumption is proof that "The hangover from a colonial mentality has to stop." It is in this sense that racism is arguably at the core of colonialism (Herszenhorn and Barigazzi, 2020: n.p.). Yet, the devastating causalities so far recorded around the world and the declaration of Africa as the least hit by the pandemic despite a second wave is a pointer to how the whole gamut of racism as a force standing in the way of African development has thrived over the centuries on sentimental rather than scientific assumptions.

In pushing the racist sentiments, various Western institutions and other scholastic outlets have tried to theorize why Africa is not as ravaged by the pandemic as the rest of the world. One such has been the "herd immunity" theory (McVeigh, 2020), which assumes that because Africans on account of their poverty live in close herds have developed a high level of immunity that explains why they are not as vulnerable as the rest of the world. By denying that Africans and their leaders have taken appropriate steps in stemming the tide of the pandemic and to record the best global outcome, Western racism is made most legible in its attempt to inscribe African agency in inertia and serendipity. Among such is the permission for herbal

remedies which have proven over the centuries to be efficacious in African response to pandemics and which African leaders and governments have admitted and granted use and trials at various levels (Iwuoha *et al.*, 2020: 643).

Therefore, the overall best performance of African response to the pandemic that is apparent in the unexpected low death-rate and exceptionally high recovery level constitutes a strategic lesson on the inevitability of seeking endogenous solutions and paradigms to the articulation and implementation of African development. The subjugation of the continent to Western imperialism in the past 500 years has operationalized racism as its most potent tool. Covid-19 offers a redemptive vista for African development by showing that seeking African solutions can lead Africa out of its present socio-economic quagmire without subjecting itself to the whims and caprices of Western paradigms that have consistently sought to keep the continent under. By refusing to take as absolute paradigms that are not reflective of African realities and imaginaries, much progress stands to be made and the African response to covid-19 is a sure first and iconic step towards the recovery of African and Black integrity. The approach is a profoundly strategic model of self-reliance for a continental development paradigm shift with prospects for global resonances. This much is the case, just as the appropriation of other developmental best practices from other continents would be in order.

Famine and COVID: exacerbation of an already critical nutritional situation

With millions of people already plunged into poverty and famine, developing countries like Niger risk seeing their efforts dashed by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the United Nations, the number of people affected by the pandemic could double from 265 million people to nearly 500 million. The causal factors would come from the measures taken by the government to fight against the pandemic such as limiting the movement of food and people or the interruption of food chains, resulting in shortages and rising prices of food. According to the FAO, stunting affects 75 million children under 5 and wasting 17 million children.

However, the extent of these measures differs from one country to another, hence the need for a case-by-case analysis to understand the likely effects on hunger.

In this paper we examine the specific case of Niger, a developing country ranked among the countries most affected by hunger and famine. Indeed, the disruption of livelihoods contributes to increasing the vulnerability of millions of people already facing poverty, in a country where a large part of the rural population still lives in a situation of chronic food insecurity. Empirical research on food crises has been refocused on the course of the crises of 2005 and 2010 in Niger (Michiels *et al.*, 2007; Michiels *et al.*, 2011) and on understanding the recurrence of crises with its nutritional dimension of food security.

The analysis refocuses on how the COVID pandemic could worsen the number of nutritionally deficient vulnerable based on trend analysis. Since the effects of the COVID pandemic are *ex-post* effects, it does not offer a representation of the nutritional and food situation of Nigeriens after COVID, but rather informs about the consequences, trends and key issues that must be taken into account to avoid a major food crisis.

Hunger in Niger: a long-standing problem

“Food security is achieved when all people, at all times, have economically, socially and physically access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their nutritional needs and food preferences to enable them to meet their needs. lead an active and healthy life” (World Food Summit, 1996).

In Niger, the nutritional status of vulnerable groups remains worrying given the recurrence of food crises (Michiels, 2012). In fact, more and more, and in particular in recent years, rain fed crops (millet and sorghum), the basic food, are no longer sufficient to feed the population, which is growing rapidly (3.9%) (Michiels, 2012). The country's economy is based on the rural agricultural sector which provides occupation for 80% of the population and contributes 43% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, rainfalls are random, generally in deficit one year out of three. The average production is stagnant and does not cover the food needs of a rapidly growing population. The reduction in cultivable land, the degradation and impoverishment of soils (lack of fallow), the still timid practice of irrigated agriculture (expensive and not practicable everywhere), constrain the coverage of nutritional and food needs.

Also, even in a good production situation, most farmers have to resort to the market to make up their deficit during the lean season. This reflects the characteristic of a monetized rural economy in which the production of

food for own consumption is systematically associated with the search for additional resources, for all social strata. Under these conditions, even a simple surge in food prices can result in a nutritional crisis in case the peasants, with their usual incomes, are unable to obtain the necessary quantities to ensure the lean season.

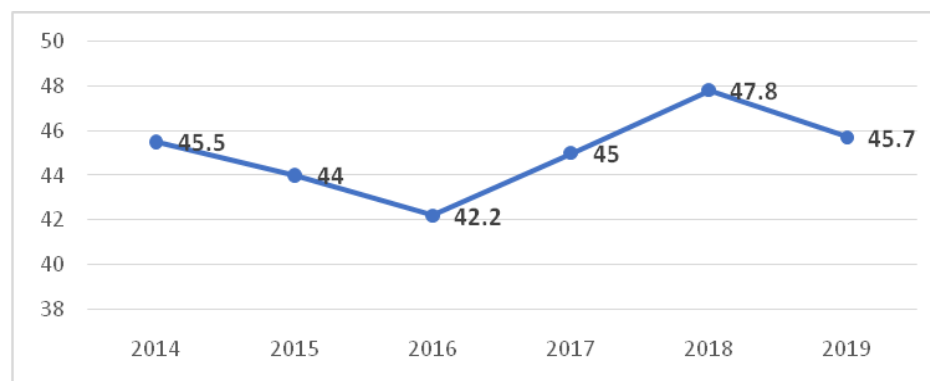
In the past two decades, five major crises (2005, 2010, 2014, 2015) have been observed and the annual cereal production deficit has fallen only moderately (Michiels *et al*, 2007, 2011, INS, 2017). These cyclical food crises generally depend on climatic hazards and consequently end up exacerbating child malnutrition. According to past trends, the prevalence of acute malnutrition has changed very little in recent years, still fluctuating between 10 to 15% corresponding to a serious situation according to the WHO classification scale.

Table 1: Nutritional status of children under 5

Evolution of child malnutrition in Niger from 1992 to 2017									
	EDSN	EDSN	ENSE	ENSE	EDSN	ENSE	ENSE	EDSN	EDSNV
	March- June 1992	March- June 1998	October 2005	October 2006	January- May 2006	May- June 2007	June- July 2008	March -June 2012	March- June 2017
Chronic malnutrition	32.3%	41.1%	50.1%	43.8%	50%	43.5%	39.3%	43.9%	43.4%
Acute malnutrition	15.8%	20.7%	15.3%	10.3%	10.3%	11.2%	10.7%	18%	15.3%

Source: Author from EDSN 2006, 2012 and 2017 EDSN 2006 2012 2017 EDSN

In 2020, cases of acute malnutrition affected more than 900,000 children aged 6-59 months, including 396,539 cases of severe acute malnutrition. The situation is even more worrying in rural areas where the annual prevalence is almost one in two children (one third in urban areas). The factors involved are generally related to inadequate food intake, high prevalence of childhood morbidities, very high anemia levels, suboptimal Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices, poor access to drinking water and poor hygiene and sanitation conditions.



Graph 1: Evolution of the prevalence of stunting from 2014 to 2019 (in%)

Source: Author

On the political level, the food and nutritional situation of Nigeriens is placed as a priority. As proof, the Constitution of 2010 included the right to food of Nigeriens among the rights and duties of the human person and food security was reaffirmed as a priority during the general policy declaration. Added to this is the ambition retained through the initiative "Nigeriens feed Nigeriens" and by setting up a High Authority for Food Security (HASA) "to reconcile emergency actions and long-term actions".

COVID-19, another threat to famine in Niger

Since March 19, 2020, progressive measures aimed at limiting the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken by the Nigerien public authorities. These include among others the closure of land and air borders, the declaration of a state of health emergency throughout the country, the closure of entrances and exits to the city of Niamey placed in medical isolation. But the restriction of trade and the establishment of a curfew throughout Niamey from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. appear to be the measures which most affect the economic activities of Nigeriens and consequently their food security. The pandemic has had a direct and indirect impact on the protection situation of the most vulnerable populations and an exacerbation of the number of people with nutritional deficiencies is to be feared.

The following analyse relies on observing past trends to identify similarities and discrepancies. Much like the 2010 crisis, the COVID crisis appears to stem from a process of impoverishment of rural households resulting in a crisis in access to food. Indeed, some of these measures constrain the access

to food products of more than 80% of the Nigerien population who depend on the market for their food. An analysis of the distribution of consumer spending by Nigerien households shows that they spend 40% of their income on food. The COVID pandemic is assimilated by its effects to a food crisis that impacts food supply and demand according to the four pillars of food and nutrition security: availability, access, use and stability.

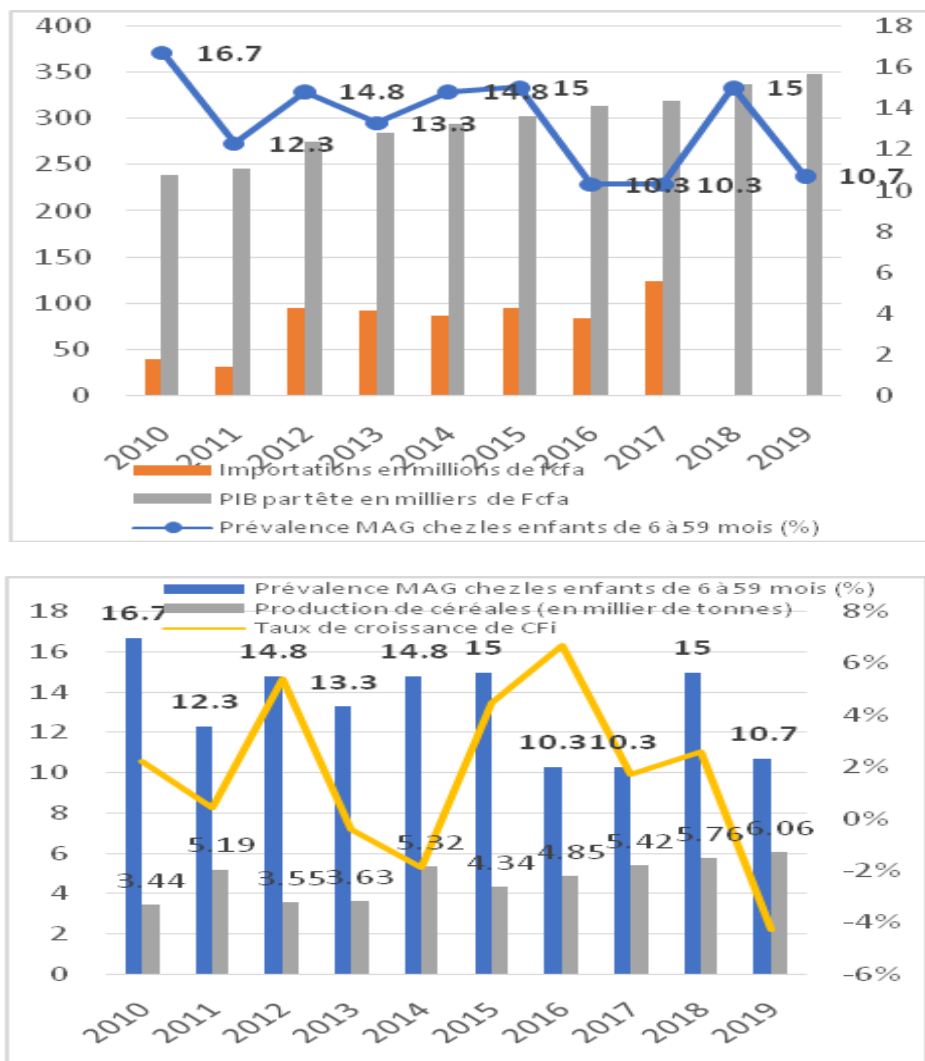
The food crises which have followed one another in the past were mostly linked to a problem of availability and followed poor rainfall. In the context of COVID, the establishment of such a link would result from the contraction of imports, the fall in production, the fall in food aid or the unavailability of agricultural labor for cause of illness. In Niger, the availability of cereals on the markets is ensured by commercial imports exempt from bans on the movement of goods and people in connection with COVID19. However, they are still down compared to the five-year average, following the closure of the border with Nigeria in August 2019.

In addition, considering access to food products, several transmission channels can be considered to assess the impact of the COVID pandemic on the food security of populations. With COVID, populations face a physical (closure of markets, disruption of distribution chains, etc.) and/or financial (loss of income, rise in food prices) inability to access healthy and diverse food. Vulnerable populations are more affected in terms of access because they are more dependent on the market for their supplies to meet food and nutritional needs. The groups that are mainly affected are:

- Farm households who depend on the market to fill their production deficit;
- People who lose their jobs and depend on their wages to eat;
- People who have ceased their activities and who depend on this income to eat;
- People who depend on imported food;
- People whose meager resources do not allow them to support the rise in food prices; and
- Vulnerable women who have lost their business as a result of the curfew measures.

The effects of the physical or financial incapacity of populations can be understood through the analysis of household consumption expenditure, the imports of foodstuffs and the reduction of activities in general.

However, in the absence of real statistics, one possibility is to refer to past crises by looking for points of similarity.



Graph 2: Evolution of hunger indicators in Niger

* MAG : malnutrition aiguë globale ; MAS : malnutrition aiguë sévère CFi : consommation finale

SOURCES: INS

The trends in global acute malnutrition and cereal supply over the period 2007-2019 reflect an average correlation between these two variables. The correlation coefficient is -53%, which shows that periods of drop in production correspond to periods of high risk of malnutrition. Restrictive measures to reduce the spread of COVID portend a reduction in production that would result from the absence of migrant workers. The 2020 response plan argues that the closure of borders in West Africa, including Niger, has strained the voluntary return and assisted reintegration program. This situation, combined with the rise in cereal prices, affects the purchasing power of the populations and can restrict the populations' access to adequate food. The COVID 19 measures seem also to impact overall wealth creation. The Government and its partners had estimated that the number of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) would increase by 35% and the number of children suffering from moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) by 27%, with 533,384 cases expected for the SAM and 1,071,501 cases expected for MAM in 2020 (Niger, 2020, pp11).

Insecurity in the context of COVID-19

The year 2020 witnessed further erosion of the global protection regime and security architecture in fragile African countries. While COVID-19 wrecked havoc in its wake, the long-standing crises continued to fester. Since its outbreak, Covid-19 is not the only plague posing threats to human security in Africa, various countries in the continent experienced escalated wave of sexual assaults and domestic violence, armed banditry, gang violence, kidnappings for ransom, extrajudicial killings and human rights abuses. Incidents of repression by security forces have driven public outcry in Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Ethiopia, Niger Republic and South Africa. Police used checkpoints established to enforce movement restrictions as an opportunity to request bribes. Data collected at checkpoints in West African countries showed that illegal taxation had jumped by 50% (Favaro, 2020). Arising from the lockdowns, Covid-19 protocols and travel restrictions; counter-terrorism, conflict management and prosecution of criminals suffered significant setback.

Extrajudicial killings and human rights abuses

The enforcement of the lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic led to breakdown of law and order characterised by extra-judicial killings, extortions and human rights abuses. Indeed, violent and punitive

enforcement of lockdowns and public health measures undermined trust rather than support compliance to the COVID-19 protocol. On 15th March, three people were killed by security forces in the Niger Republic with claim that they violated the anti-government protest law which was extended due to the COVID-19 scourge (Crisis Group, 2020). The National Human Rights Commission reported it received 231 complaints of rights violations perpetrated by security forces in Nigeria between April and May, 2020 (NHRC, 2020). The cases included: extra-judicial killings, torture, inhumane and degrading treatment, violation of right to freedom of movement, unlawful arrest and detention, unlawful seizure/confiscation of properties, extortion, sexual and gender-based violence to discrimination in the distribution of COVID-19 related relief items (NHRC, 2020).

During the pandemic, the National Human Rights Commission applied its normative and rule-making mandate to issue guidelines and advisory opinions to national and state governments on protecting the human rights of vulnerable groups in the COVID-19 response. These include: The Standard Minimum Guidelines for Human Rights of COVID-19 Patients in Treatment Centres in Nigeria and the Advisory Opinion on the Protection of the Rights and Dignity of Almajiri Children in COVID-19 Response. The repatriation of Almajiri children by the Northern state governments was another issue of concern during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. It was a season of repatriation in the Northern part of Nigeria as the state governments saw Almajiri of different state of origin as threat to their states. Retaliation of the repatriation started after the Kano state government took the first turn. However, the federal government of Nigeria had guidelines for the movement of people during the COVID-19 lockdown, yet the respective state governments violated the guidelines and infringed on the human rights of the Almajiri by transporting them from one state to another in rickety trucks, without any clearly defined protocols. Security forces, including police and the army, were deployed to enforce the restrictions, sparking deadly confrontations in some parts of Nigeria. Between January 2017 and May, 2020, about 82 cases of torture and extrajudicial killings were perpetrated by SARS officers in Nigeria. In October 2020, the video of extrajudicial killing by a SARS officer went viral and culminated into the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria. At least 56 people were killed by security forces using excessive force. The Lekki shootings, which the government of Nigeria denied, attracted global condemnation.

In the imbroglia that followed across the country, an estimated number of 73 people, which included 22 policemen were killed. About 205 critical national security assets- mostly police stations, corporate facilities and private property were attacked burnt or vandalized (Olaniyi, 2020). Also, 71 public warehouses and 248 privately owned stores were looted in the course of the protests in 15 states and Abuja (Olaniyi, 2020). The states are Lagos, Edo, Delta, Oyo, Kano, Plateau, Osun, Ondo, Ogun, Adamawa, Kwara, Rivers, Abia, Imo, and Ekiti states, as well as Abuja.

Conflicts and militancy

While COVID-19 has taken centre stage, conflicts have continued uninterrupted in many parts of Africa. Thus, some African countries faced the dual challenge of conflicts and the pandemic. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' call was adopted by the UN Security Council, for a global ceasefire during the pandemic. The UN's plea on 10 April to treat war as a "non-essential activity" has fallen on deaf ears across Africa. Islamist militants in the Sahel and Mozambique have both carried out large-scale attacks to advance their interests. Nigeria combined the scourge of insecurity/conflicts in the face of COVID-19 pandemic (Idowu, 2020). In Lake Chad region, Boko Haram further launched attacks on military personnel, farmers, fishermen and traders. Similarly, Somalia's al-Shabab has launched further attacks.

In the era of COVID-19, conflict resolution processes and peacekeeping were deprioritised amid travel bans and budget cuts, opening space for militia groups in Libya, South Sudan and Central African Republic. Libya finds itself with the colliding emergencies of an escalating war and the outbreak of COVID-19. The collapse of healthcare system and the reduction of the humanitarian space due to travel and security restrictions have created a pandemic within a pandemic in the war-torn country. Many vulnerable groups were caught between conflict and COVID-19 (Piscitelli, 2020). The outcome is a compounding mixture of risk factors, including weak public health systems and strain on resources to combat both the pandemic and security concerns (Africa Centre, 2020). The links between COVID-19 and conflict should further provide impetus to the African Union's "Silence the Guns" initiative (Africa Centre, 2020).

Criminality and COVID-19-specific criminal scams

Criminal gangs adapted to life under coronavirus. With fewer victims out on the streets, murder rates apparently dropped by more than 70% in South Africa after the start of the lockdown on 26 March, 2020 and the outbreak has prompted gangs to call a truce. However, the picture is less positive in Nigerian cities, where the release of prisoners and lockdown hardships has caused petty crimes to rise.

Some COVID-19-specific criminal scams have emerged. For example, Kenyan police in early April warned of criminal gangs impersonating COVID-19 surveillance teams on door-to-door testing to conduct robberies. In South Africa, criminals have also posed as workers from the Department of Health to gain access to business and residences. Similar reports and warnings about scammers disguising as government or aid workers were reported in Nigeria as well. Economic stress further pushed crime rates upwards. Routine patrol was deprioritised in favour of enforcing curfews, increasing police response times (Favaro, 2020).

Soaring rate of sexual assaults and domestic violence

Nigerian police reported a total of 717 rape cases between January and May, a dramatic increase over the same period in 2019 but a small fraction of what broader statistics suggest: In Nigeria 25% of girls and 10% of boys report experiencing sexual assault before age 18, according to a 2014 UNICEF study (Abrak, 2020). All the 36 state governors in Nigeria declared a state of emergency over the number of rapes and other sexual assaults. During the lockdown, the brutal rape and murder of a 22-year-old university student, Uwavera Omozuwa, in a Benin City church in June, 2020 sparked street protests and the Twitter #WeAreTired. Physical distancing measures, office and courthouses closures and movement restrictions during the global pandemic made it even more difficult for social workers and police to respond to cases.

In Anambra state alone, more than 80 cases of fathers allegedly raping their daughters were reported to the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development between March and May, 2020. Eleven men were arrested in June for allegedly raping a 12-year-old girl in Jigawa state, in the northwestern part of Nigeria (Abrak, 2020). Gang rapes were equally reported.

Killings, kidnappings and banditry amid COVID-19 pandemic

As the world growl under the devastating pangs of COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria continued to witness insecurity such as kidnapping, banditry, and killings with weak security responses. These criminalities further provoked inter-communal conflicts. From January 2020, Boko Haram insurgency, murderous activities of bandits, kidnapers and violence claimed more than 2,771 lives in Nigeria (Olaiya, 2020).

Many people have been abducted or went missing as they fled the attacks of bandits or Boko Haram terrorists. The eleven-year conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian security forces led to the disappearance of thousands of people in the rural areas of northeastern Nigeria. In 2014, Boko Haram abducted hundreds of people including Chibok schoolgirls in 2014. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Nigeria has 23,000 out of 44,000 missing people in Africa. It is also the ICRC's highest number of registered missing people in any part of the world (Ewang, 2020). In the northwest of Nigeria, kidnappings for ransom have become a daily affair. Motorcycles riding armed bandits are using abandoned forest reserves and highways to kidnap and invade rural communities (Orjinmo, 2020). In June 2020, gruesome massacre in Borno State left over 80 people dead than the Covid-19 had done in three months. Most of the victims were young people. The unrelenting insecurity continued with the massacre of dozens of migrant farm workers in the rice fields of Koshobe, Borno State. About 349 people were killed and 290 kidnapped in violent attacks in November, 2020 alone. The insecurity involved extra-judicial killings, Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency, cult-related clashes and farmers-herdsmen clashes (Kabir, 2020).

As the outrage continued barely two weeks after, Boko Haram claimed it was behind the 11 December, 2020 abduction of hundreds of students at the Government Science Secondary School, Kankara in Katsina State. Many schools have also suffered from abduction of students, which created panic and closure of schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Strengthening the social protection system is an essential prerequisite for increasing the resilience of populations against Covid-19, racism, hunger and insecurity. Basic social safety net programmes designed to fight

poverty and chronic vulnerability must therefore be popularised on a larger scale and be more targeted. While it has become crucial for governments to enforce lockdown measures, the rights of citizens must be guaranteed in accordance with national laws and international human rights conventions. Security forces should be more proactive in taming the scourge of terrorism, banditry and kidnappings that has threatened many vulnerable communities. In the era of COVID-19, conflict resolution processes and peacekeeping should be re-prioritised. To get there, we need more people-centred resilient actions and pro-poor socio-economic reform programme.

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