

# THREE

## Covid-19 alternative treatment and the Nigeria government: between business as usual and the sanctity of human life

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### Abstracts

Historically, societies respond to disease or ailments with what they have and know. This has been evident in the cases of China and Western countries in the recent fight against COVID-19. But this has not been the case in Nigeria, as the country still heavily depends on the West and disparages the use of Traditional Medicine (TM). This concern is important now because there is no known cure for COVID-19, which has been described as very dangerous and has the scale of a pandemic. Exploring the situation in Nigeria, the paper makes a strong case for TM in the face of a paradox. Although there is COVID-19, the relatively low number of COVID-19 cases cannot be a result of chance. What then can be responsible? Three hypotheses were tested in this study, namely, first, that there is not enough testing going on; secondly, that Nigerians are not reporting cases of infection as they occur; and thirdly, that many Nigerians are infected but have alternative remedies that they are using as preventives and management methods in response to the symptoms of COVID-19 outside the hospitals, with evidence of positive results. An online survey was conducted among selected groups, health workers, business owners and religious members. The responses were analysed to highlight methods used in the fight against COVID-19 among different groups. The online survey carried out by the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos, shows that all respondents used alternative methods to prevent and treat symptoms of COVID-19 and all of them recovered with two stating that sleep and frequent movement of bowel were felt as side effects. The paper concludes that the Nigerian government should have engaged more with practitioners of TM in the fight against COVID-19.

*Traitement alternatif Covid-19 et gouvernement nigérian: entre le statu quo et le caractère sacré de la vie humaine*

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### Résumés

*Historiquement, les sociétés réagissent à la maladie ou aux affections avec ce qu'elles possèdent et savent faire. Cela a été prouvé dans les cas de la Chine et des pays occidentaux dans la récente lutte contre le COVID-19. Mais cela n'a pas été le cas au Nigeria, car le pays dépend encore fortement de l'Occident et ignore l'utilisation de la médecine traditionnelle (MT). Cette préoccupation est importante maintenant car il n'existe aucun remède connu pour COVID-19, qui a été décrit comme très dangereux et a l'ampleur d'une pandémie. En statuant sur le cas du Nigeria, l'article plaide en faveur de la MT face à ce paradoxe. Bien qu'il y ait COVID-19, le nombre relativement faible de cas de COVID-19 ne peut pas être le résultat du hasard. Qu'est-ce qui peut alors en être la cause? Trois hypothèses ont été testées dans cette étude, à savoir, premièrement, qu'il n'y a pas assez de tests en cours; deuxièmement, que les Nigériens ne signalent pas les cas d'infection au fur et à mesure qu'ils surviennent; et troisièmement, que de nombreux Nigériens sont infectés mais disposent de remèdes alternatifs qu'ils utilisent comme méthodes de prévention et de gestion en réponse aux symptômes de COVID-19 en dehors des hôpitaux,*

*avec des preuves de résultats positifs. Une enquête en ligne a été menée auprès de groupes sélectionnés, d'agents de santé, de propriétaires d'entreprises et de membres religieux. Les réponses ont été analysées pour mettre en évidence les méthodes utilisées dans la lutte contre le COVID-19 parmi différents groupes. L'enquête en ligne réalisée par l'Institut des études africaines et de la diaspora de l'Université de Lagos, montre que tous les répondants ont utilisé des méthodes alternatives pour prévenir et traiter les symptômes de COVID-19 et tous se sont rétablis avec deux témoignages qui montrent que le sommeil et les selles fréquentes étaient ressentis comme des effets secondaires. Le document conclut que le gouvernement nigérian aurait dû s'engager davantage avec les praticiens de la MT dans la lutte contre le COVID-19.*

*Mots clés : Covid-19 ; Traitement alternatif ; gouvernement nigérian; Vie humaine*

## **Introduction**

Historically, societies have responded to diseases or ailments using natural healthcare methods that they learnt or developed overtime. The efficacy of such natural methods have made different governments to support Traditional Medicine (TM). This has been evident in the cases of China and, in more recent times, Madagasca. It has, however, not happened on a significant scale in Nigeria, where “For many millions of people, herbal medicines, traditional treatments, and traditional practitioners are the main source of health care, and sometimes the only source of care.” Despite numerous claims and submissions from traditional practitioners, researchers as well as individuals who have recovered from COVID-19 regarding TM regimen, Nigeria Government and the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 continues to respond to COVID-19 pandemic based on what Western countries are doing even as they watch the number of cases and death rise in Nigeria. For them, it is business as usual.

On the 5th of April 2020, the WHO predicted that infection and death toll may reach millions. This prediction came when the numbers of COVID-19 cases in the US, Italy and Spain, among others were rising. The focus of the Global North was however on Africa, where the healthcare system is next to zero and the COVID-19 cases are slowly rising.

It is obvious that the healthcare system in Nigeria cannot handle the kind of numbers that are being predicted, based on patterns seen in countries that have much better healthcare systems. This, one would think, will make the Nigerian government to quickly identify alternative means of handling the COVID-19. As a researcher in the area of TM for over a decade, two related starting points for such an effort come to mind. First and readily available are the numerous suggestions available on social media and the second starting point will be the more systematic platform which has the traditional medical practitioners. I have done and seen researches that show that Nigerians use alternative medicine as the first point of call for many ailments.

This study is a position paper inspired by the result of an online survey conducted by the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos on what Nigerians are using to prevent or manage the symptoms of COVID-19.

## **Literature review**

COVID-19 has been described as very dangerous such that the WHO (2020) scaled it up from an epidemic to a pandemic. In the course of the past few months, COVID-19 has claimed thousands of lives with daily mortality rate in some developed countries rising to over 1,100. With this experience, the

WHO and world governments began to do all that was humanly possible in order to salvage whatever was possible. China, where the pandemic began, has as part of their preventive and curative measures, weeks of lockdown for different regions where people could not leave their homes. Other countries began their response with travel bans especially from China and other areas where the infection was spreading. And gradually, the whole world moved to a point where everywhere was under lockdown. Medical personnel are doing their best, as there are reports of nurses and doctors as well as volunteers running daily shifts that lasted twelve long hours.

The wave of COVID-19 came to Nigeria like it did everywhere in the world. On the 21st of March the land borders were closed following travel bans from countries that were experiencing high numbers of cases of COVID-19 infection. With the border shut, Lagos and other states went into statewide lockdown modes, and this was reemphasized by President Muhammadu Buhari on the 29th of March, 2020, in his nationwide broadcast. Some states, including Lagos, Abuja, Ogun, were placed on total lockdown as these states had more cases of COVID-19 infections.

While the country was on lockdown, the government continued her response to COVID-19 primarily using Western protocols. There already was in place a Presidential Task Force to monitor and advise the presidency on preventive and management measures against the spread of COVID-19. States began to set up isolation centers to the best of their capabilities. The country as a whole began to experience a slow but steady rise in the number of cases, although the numbers are lower than what was expected of a developing country.

To back up the healthcare systems, different people made posts of different alternative treatments for COVID-19 on the social media, and many people of different faith were turning to God. There were different calls for prayers and return to traditional ways of discerning situation as contained in the Ifá divination process. There were different videos of different Babaláwo (diviners) consulting and performing sacrifices to end the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over one month after the borders were shut, the number of infected persons nationwide has risen beyond a thousand, and health officials were saying that the worst was not yet at hand. Everyone hoped that Nigeria would not be announcing the millions of COVID-19 infected patients as WHO had predicted. Italy and Spain that had the worst incident in Europe began to experience respite. Although the numbers were rising in the US, any serious mind should wonder where the millions of COVID-19 cases may come from to meet WHO's prediction.

The situation in Nigeria presented a paradox: although there was lockdown, the healthcare system and social behaviours did not account for the low number of COVID-19 cases (1,000 cases compared to 200 million Nigerians, two months into the fight against COVID-19). What then could have been responsible? What were Nigerians doing right? These questions are based on the belief that the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) is not altering the statistics of reported cases of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

These concerns provide three hypotheses:

- i) There is not enough testing for COVID-19 in Nigeria.
- ii) Nigerians were not reporting cases of infection as they occurred.
- iii) Nigerians were infected but had Alternatives remedies that they were using as preventives and management methods in response to the symptoms of COVID-19 outside the hospitals.

It is based on the third hypothesis that the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos conducted an online survey to find out what Nigerians were doing right to prevent and respond to symptoms of COVID-19. Since the medical system in Nigeria recognizes Traditional Medicine as a functional part of the system, practitioners of Alternative/Traditional Medicine were also asked to indicate if they had been attending to COVID-19 patients, and what they prescribed. The response from the practitioners was not informative as only four practitioners responded to the survey form. This is understandable because the Government of Nigeria has not taken alternative medicine seriously and the practitioners are nonchalant to research. Typically, they ask, 'What have they done with the past information?'

### **Statement of the problem**

The numbers of COVID-19 cases in Nigeria did not meet the predictions that millions would be infected and die in the process. What then happened? It is difficult to verify if the Ifá consultations and sacrifices were right and if they helped. Hence, is it difficult to measure the answer to prayers made by Christians and Muslims alike? It is only safe and easy to believe that God heard the prayers and sacrifices slowed down the spread of COVID-19. From the government's point of view, it was the lockdown and stay at home that helped in slowing down the spread of COVID-19.

The true Nigerian situation shows that, although the lockdown was announced, there were sizable number of people flouting the order, due to factors such as hunger and lack of education. There has been nothing close to social distancing in the way relief packages were distributed, the number and size of slums in Nigeria makes it impossible to achieve social distancing. There was also a near show-of-shame scenario on the National Television when the death was announced of Abba Kyari, Chief of Staff to the Nigerian President, and a huge crowd including the Chairman of the Presidential Task Force on the fight against COVID-19, Boss Mustapha, was in attendance at the burial. Beyond social distancing, there is no pipe born water running for regular hand wash, the hand sanitizers are not as available as should be. What is gradually taking shape is the availability and use of homemade facemasks.

What then happened in Nigeria? The protocols failed, but people were not dying in the huge numbers that WHO had predicted. This study researches into why Nigerian are resilient in the fight against COVID-19 even when the Federal and State Governments were about business as usual. While this scenario lasted, reports emerged on social media via the NCDC in Kano State, that the number of deaths which was rising in that state, had suddenly shut down.

### **Method and data**

There were two sets of data collected. The first set was collected via the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos. The first data collection was initiated as an online survey with the objective of asking Nigerians about the coping strategies they adopted during COVID-19 pandemic. The online forms were shared via different social media using Google form. Researchers at the Institute dispatched the forms to their contacts and over one thousand Nigerians were contacted but only one hundred and fifty-three respondents filled the forms. The survey size was small, and this made it imperative to have a second data collection. A purposive survey was conducted in Lagos over a period of three months (between May and July, 2020). Lagos was chosen because it had the highest number of COVID-19 cases in Nigeria. The interviews were to find out how many were using the most popular recipe (of ginger, lemon, garlic and turmeric) that was gathered in the first survey and what the effect was. There were five hundred interviews of those that purchased drinks as well as raw ginger, lemon,

garlic and turmeric, from markets and families. The interviews built on the first findings and showed the belief in the efficacy of the combination of ginger, lemon, garlic and turmeric. Data was analyzed to highlight the belief in the efficacy of the combination of vegetables in the fight against COVID-19.

## **Result**

The online survey carried out by the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos, shows that responses were from 8 states with the Federal Capital Territory and Lagos having 30% of the respondents. All respondents confirmed that they used alternative methods to prevent and treat symptoms of COVID-19 and all of them recovered with two respondents stating that sleep and frequent movement of bowel were felt as side effects.

100% of all respondents who responded had been using various alternative therapies and 100% of those that had used these different alternatives had fully recovered from the COVID-19 symptoms that they experienced.

According to the survey, frequently recurrent combination of items used by respondents are:

- 1) Drinking lemon, ginger and garlic in hot water.
- 2) Vitamin C and fruits
- 3) The Daily Detox Tea Mix, administered orally (that is, drinking it hot)
- 4) Orange peels, garlic, ginger & onions boiled in water.
- 5) Garlic, lemon, ginger, green tea, moringa, hot water
- 6) Orange peel, ginger, onions, garlic, lemon
- 7) Turmeric, garlic, onions, ginger, orange, lemon rind, neem leaves
- 8) Neem leaves, lemon, ginger and garlic
- 9) Lemon grass, aloe vera, ginger
- 10) Lemon grass, moringa seed, scent leaf, ginseng and soda water
- 11) Salt and warm water solution
- 12) Orange peels, garlic, ginger & onions boiled in water.

The five hundred (500) respondents found the combination of ginger, lemon, garlic and turmeric as effective preventives as well as cures for COVID-19 symptoms. 30% of the respondents were taking combinations similar to ginger, lemon, garlic and turmeric before COVID-19, while 45% confirmed that they would continue to use the combination of ginger, lemon, garlic and turmeric after COVID-19 has disappeared. 70% of the respondents preferred the already bottled mixture, while 30% prepared the recipe from home.

## **Discussion**

This section of the paper adopts the pattern of comparing the present situation in Nigeria and compares it with what reason/common sense accepts as viable option to fight COVID-19. The “as usual” phrase indicates the seeming failure of Nigeria Government in the fight against COVID-19. The finding of the online survey justifies the content of the Traditional Medicine Policy for Nigeria (2007) that “Despite the rapid expansion of conventional medicine in the last three decades and the rapid increase in its human resources, a majority of Nigerians still utilize Traditional Medicine. In addition, available evidence indicates that some herbal remedies and traditional therapeutic regimen are efficacious and

affordable.” Also, “Regardless of reasons for seeking out Traditional & Complementary Medicine (T&CM), there is little doubt that interest has grown, and will almost certainly continue to grow, around the world.” However, as usual, the Minister of Health is still waiting to test alternative therapies that the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) has approved, which are already in use.

It is possible that the lack of testing kits for COVID-19 was responsible for the initial low number of COVID-19 cases in Nigeria. The first two months had only few thousands of Nigerians testing positive to COVID-19 out of over 200 million citizens. An edition of Saturday Vanguard had a headline caption stating ‘COVID-19: Lagos may have 39,000 cases – Govt.’ It was reported that this number of persons required tracing, but this was virtually impossible because Nigeria had no testing kits.

That Nigerians were not reporting cases of infection as they occurred may be true as many Nigerians do not report ailments in the hospitals until the conditions are bad, especially when it may attract some kind of stigma. “It has been estimated that there are only 27 physicians per 100,000 people in Nigeria.” There have also been cases of people not being forthright with patient history, as is the case with suspended Professor Salami of Ilorin Teaching Hospital who covered up a case of COVID-19 infection which he had been treating surreptitiously. It was reported “Salman a Professor of Internal Medicine who is a specialist in infectious diseases, and he knew how slippery, dangerous and deadly Coronavirus is, but yet: He lied about the health and traveling status of the Deceased to get him admitted by UITH.”

Although, the NCDC sends out messages asking people to report any symptom of COVID-19 which they felt, it remains difficult to ascertain how many have reported out of the thousands of Nigerians that returned to country before the borders were closed. So far, less than 10,000 Nigerians have been tested and about 1,000 have tested positive. But the death rate in Nigeria has not increased drastically. If the first two hypotheses are true, then the death rate should rise even though people are not reporting. The mortality rate in Nigeria has not changed drastically since the beginning of the pandemic. At least, there are no reports showing increase in the nation’s death rate. The reported increase in the mortality rate in Kano has been mildly linked to COVID-19, though without enough empirical bases.

The third hypothesis, that ‘Nigerians are infected but have Alternatives remedies that they are using as preventives and managements methods in response to the symptoms of COVID-19 outside the hospitals,’ seems to be the only hypothesis that has been verified and turns out to be true. There have been reports of people who have used Alternative methods and have had positive results. Researches show that the first points of call for majority of Nigerian are the traditional practitioners. At the International Conference on Traditional Medicine for South-East Asian Countries in February 2013, the WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, stated that “traditional medicines, of proven quality, safety, and efficacy, contribute to the goal of ensuring that all people have access to care. For many millions of people, herbal medicines, traditional treatments, and traditional practitioners are the main source of healthcare, and sometimes the only source of care.” And Traditional medicine also “stands out as a way of coping with the relentless rise of chronic non-communicable diseases.” In the late 1990s the WHO estimated that about 85% of Africans relied on traditional medicine to meet their health needs. The story has not changed much. The social media has been flooded with different alternative recipes that can either prevent or cure the symptoms of COVID-19 as there is still no Western acclaimed cure. The reliability of TM and the fact that there is no known cure for COVID-19 have not made the Nigerian

government to do more than the lockdown and non-pharmaceutical protocols as they built more isolation centres for patients that have tested positive for COVID-19.

### **Government and the 'As Usual' syndrome**

The Government has forgotten that NAFDAC has approved and registered dozens of Traditional remedies, and even if they did, the recent meeting reported in The Guardian News Paper on the 3rd of March, 2020, signals government's seeming lack of political will to act as appropriate for the situation at hand. The reported headline reads "Iwu presents plants-based çure' for COVID-19 to science ministry," and, according to the report:

A team of researchers led by professor of Pharmacognosy from the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN), Maurice Iwu yesterday presented a plant-based patented treatment for COVID-19 to the Minister of Science and Technology, Dr. Ogbonnaya Onu. Iwu, who is also the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Bioresources Development Group (BDG), presented the cure to Onu in the presence of Minister of State for Health, Adeleke Olurunnimbe Mamora, Minister of State for Science and Technology, Mohammed H. Abdullahi and Permanent Secretary of the ministry Dr. Mohammed Bello.

According to the Minister of Health at a press conference of the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 held in Lagos on Tuesday the 8th of April, (one month and five days after Prof. Iwu presented his findings) "We'll consider traditional medicine for COVID-19 treatment", and he added "We will look into every assertion. Some people say they have herbs and some others say they have concoctions. Only for those that are serious, the Department of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the Ministry of Health will look into their claims and we will not throw away any suggestion."

The responses represent typical bias of a Western-trained physician who can only affirm whatever the West says is right. I have worked with Traditional Medicine Boards in the said Ministry of Health and they have long list of certified (by the Board) practitioners who are in practice. What more does the Minister want? What about the researches that are going on in the Universities and Government parastatals such as the report of Dr Ibrahim Lawal, head of Biomedical Research Centre, Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN) in response to COVID-19 pandemic. How many of the drugs being used today in the fight against COVID-19 were first tested for COVID-19 before they were prescribed?

Outside Nigeria, TM is gaining relevance in the fight against COVID-19. The Premium Times, a Nigerian tabloid, on the 25th of April reported that "Madagascar launches herbal medicine against COVID-19". After successfully treating TWO case of COVID-19 with COVID-Organics' the president Andry Rajoelina "launched a herbal medicine believed to cure and prevent the virus. The herbal medicine developed by Malagasy Institute of Applied Research." According to the decree of the President, all school children and the less privilege in the society were to be given COVID-Organics for free to curb the spread of the virus.

### **'As Usual'**

In Nigeria, despite all the reports that show positive response to alternative medicine, the Government is not paying attention to it. Experts have spoken about alternative medicine and COVID-19 in the national dailies. When the Nigerian Tribune reported under a headline "COVID-19: Traditional Medicine Practitioners Seek Partnership With WHO, NCDC, Makinde," professional indicated their willingness to render their support to WHO, NCDC and Governor Seyi Makinde in a letter dated 1st of April as reported by Nigerian Tribune:

A body of traditional medicine practitioners, the National Association of Nigerian Traditional Medicine Practitioners (NANTMP), has declared its readiness to partner with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the Oyo State government and orthodox medical practitioners to end the coronavirus pandemic. The association made its intention known in three separately letters, dated April 1, 2020 and addressed to the WHO Country Representative to Nigeria, Dr Wondimagegnehu, the NCDC Director-General, Dr Chikwe Ihekweazu and Governor Seyi Makinde of Oyo State.

The association, in the letters, copies of which were made available to the Nigerian Tribune on Thursday, said it would be mainstreaming traditional medicine, along with orthodox medicine, in the fight against the dreaded coronavirus. What the association did is clearly stated in the vision of Traditional Medicine Policy for Nigeria (2007), which is for “The establishment of a situation whereby both conventional and traditional medicine practitioners legally and freely render their services in parallel but in clear understanding of each other and in close collaboration at all levels of healthcare delivery system and providing the chance for the patient to make an informed choice.”

In addition to the Policy, the WHO has noted that Traditional Medicine “is care that is close to homes, accessible and affordable. It is also culturally acceptable and trusted by large numbers of people. The affordability of most traditional medicines makes them all the more attractive at a time of soaring health-care costs and nearly universal austerity.”

In another report, Dr. Johnson Idowu, traditional medicine practitioner and the executive director of the Research Institute of Traditional and Alternative Medicine told The West African Pilot News, “The government is paying lip-service to the development of traditional medicine in Nigeria, this is why we have a situation where we are waiting for the vaccines western countries are battling to produce. Blackseed is not indigenous to Nigeria. We have indigenous plants with strong anti-viral and radio-protective properties that can serve as a portent cure for COVID-19.”

But the Federal government of Nigeria is inviting the West to come and help out even when the country has not as much as looked at its own home-grown solutions that are available affordable and effective. And they are waiting for the WHO to recommend to them what to do with COVID-19 that has been described as a novel virus and, compared with other viruses, has no known cure.

### **‘As Usual’**

In spite of the suggestions, recommendations reported success of Alternative medicine in the fight against COVID-19, the Nigeria Government is still going about her business as usual, at the expense of vulnerable Nigerians who may die. It seems, as long as those close to the Villa are okay, life goes on. It would seem that what is most important to the Government is the raising of billions of dollars that will not be accounted for. Other than setting up isolation centres, with teaching Hospitals that have beds and side cupboards only, one wonders what the Government is doing to develop medicine for COVID-19.

What happens to all the Alternative options that have been suggested by prominent Nigerians, people who have used them and have come out saying the alternatives were helpful? The stories are as usual, the Government says it will look into it, maybe when COVID-19 is over and lives must have been lost. The Guardian Life reported that:



While medical practitioners and scientists search for the solution to the global pandemic, Coronavirus, His Majesty, Ooni Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi of Ife has decided to look inward and focus on our traditional herbs...

According to him, the following herbs are potent enough to heal anyone down with the virus: Boundary tree leaves (Botanical name – *Newbouldia laevis*, Yoruba – Ewe Akoko), Neem leave and fruits or Indian lilac (Botanical – *Azadirachta indica*, Yoruba- ewe dogoyaro), onion (Botanical name – *Allium cepa*; Yoruba – Alubosa), forest anchomanes (Botanical name – *Anchomanes difformis*, Yoruba -Ogirisako); aridan (Botanical name – *Tetrapleura tetraptera*) African pepper/Ngero pepper/Guinea pepper (Botanical name – *Xylopiya aethiopica*, Yoruba Eeru or Erinje); Bitter leaf (Botanical name – *Vernonia amygdalina*, Yoruba – Ewuro, Sulfur (Yoruba – Iyin Ojo)... Although there is no scientific proof that the herbs have or will work against coronavirus, Ooni insisted that “I have used it and also used it for some of the chronic Corona patients with testimonials.

To corroborate the claim of the Ooni of Ife, The Cable, one of Nigeria’s online News media, had a report titled: Makinde: There are local solutions to boost immune system against coronavirus, and on the 8th of April, 2020, the Governor did not deny the claim. He at the Press Briefing, and as the Head of the Oyo State COVID-19 Task Force, said, after recovery and self-isolation, that his government was “also looking at local solutions to boost immunity based on expert opinion, as part of home-grown solutions to deal with COVID-19”. This was the last item on the press briefing when it should have been the first and most important item, especially as the alternative therapy was prescribed by a Western trained Physician.

#### **‘As Usual’**

It seems that the Federal Government wants the numbers of COVID-19 cases and presumably deaths to rise so as to justify the spending of the stimulus packages as “In the wake of the pandemic virus, the Central Bank of Nigeria came out with series of interventions, unveiled in quick succession, starting with N50 billion targeted credit facility and another N100 billion credit support for the health sector.”

This is different from the millions of dollars that will either be borrowed or collected in donation, especially as IMF is already considering approving millions of dollars to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. It is easy to reach this kind of assumption as government officials seize opportunities like this to loot and enrich themselves. The social media made a cartoon of the sad situation saying that: “A Government that cannot finish sharing over 7 million voter cards in two years, shared N5.2bn in 72 hours... are we not serving a miracle God” This was referring to the activity of the Minister of Finance who claimed she was distributing money as palliative to Nigerians due to the lockdown.

#### **‘As Usual’**

News made the rounds on the 30th of March that the Chief Medical Director (CMD) of the University College Hospital (UCH), Jesse Otegbayo, tested positive for COVID-19 and on the 3rd of April, there was a headline on Premium Times saying: ‘Days after testing ‘positive’ to COVID-19, UCH chief tests ‘negative’- Official The Public Relations Officer of the hospital, Toye Akinrinlola, noted that the sample taken on Tuesday came out negative. Although the reason for the change was not disclosed, social media linked it to the case of the Oyo State governor who had used alternative treatment and cured the symptoms of COVID-19. The CMD is well and out of isolation, he is reported to have resumed work, and pushing and recommending the therapies that the West is using and the mortality rate is in the thousands. One wonders why he has not disclosed what changed the test results so that Nigerians can

use it as well, if it is alternative treatment, should he not be championing that course as the CMD of a teaching hospital?

### **'As Usual**

The medical cross-section of the Presidential Task Force is composed of only Western-trained healthcare practitioners who are many times guilty of using alternative medicine at home and have started the usual business of debating whether alternative medicine is good enough or not, and the historical mutual suspicion between Western-trained healthcare practitioners and traditional healers or alternative medicine practitioners. Whereas practitioners of Alternative medicine make claims to therapies that can both prevent and cure COVID-19, Western-trained healthcare practitioners warn against such claims. History clearly shows who has always won, this debate; the government who is always on the side of the Western trained practitioners win the debate. This again is evident in the words and the body language of the Presidential Task Force.

The Government should mandate NAFDAC, Traditional Medicine Boards, NIMR, Professors of Botany, Pharmacy, etc. to hasten research and standard as the rest of world is racing for treatment and vaccines against COVID-19. Nigerians must wake up! Nigerians must stop the Federal Government from doing business as usual, there are alternative measures that can keep Nigerian from the huge patronage of the fast-becoming fashionable isolation centres that are springing up to account for moneys that will be embezzled or unaccounted for. This is the time for Nigeria's Traditional Practitioners to be heard. If America has knowledge of alternative medicine, they will be championing it now, especially as all seems to be failing them in their healthcare system.

### **Conclusion**

The Policy on Traditional Medicine, that was established in 2007, approved the establishment of Traditional Medicine Boards in ALL Federal Ministries of Health and State Ministries of Health, where Traditional Practitioners are trained and certified. This is the time to get these boards to function at their maximum capacity. The "United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has praised the Nigerian government for handling the Coronavirus pandemic well." But if the UN wants to learn, they should listen to Nigerians on the street and ask the Alternative healthcare providers, the active voices that are not heard.

Why must Nigeria do business as usual with COVID-19, why must Nigeria play politics with human lives. Why is the Government of Nigerian acting and feigning ignorance of Alternative preventive measures and alternative responses to COVID-19 symptoms? This is the time to regulate Traditional Medicine, if indeed the Government wants to save lives. There are many prescriptions on the social media, but there is a critical need for a body to regulate so that Nigerians will know the right thing to take.

The West was ready to do anything to save lives as long as they were using known healthy remedies. President Trump was ready to try out Quinine if it was going to work, simply because it was already certified safe to use. One would have thought that the cases of the CMD of a first generation Teaching Hospital in Nigeria and that of the Governor of a state will say something meaningful the Government regarding the use of Alternative therapy in the fight against COVID-19, but no, the Presidential Task force has not even invited a traditional practitioner to join the team in the fight against COVID-19.

It is already established by statistics that many Nigerians are using Alternative therapies to prevent and respond to COVID-19 and that the therapies are available, effective and affordable with little or no side

effect as reported by the surveys conducted for this study. One can safely say that the government of Nigeria is not ready to put all that can work into the fight against COVID-19, what we have are attempts to justify money being raised and eventual account that will be rendered.

### **Recommendations**

At any rate, this is the time for practitioners of African Traditional Medicine to make critical contribution to the world in the collective fight against COVID-19 pandemic. It is highly recommended that the Federal and State governments work with practitioners of traditional medicine:

- 1) For regulation purposes, all traditional Medicine Boards should make available the list of Practitioners that they have certified as the first point of contact for Nigerians.
- 2) Botanist and Pharmacists should make known their research on basic remedies for Nigerians to use at such a critical time as this.
- 3) Alternative remedies such as steam therapies if there are concerns about ingestible should be shared along with food.
- 4) Work with research Institutes who are involved in traditional medicine and allow patients in isolation centres who are willing to use Alternative therapies opportunity to do so.
- 5) Finally, the government should revisit the Policy on Traditional Medicine as Published by Prof. Lambo in 2007.

### **Acknowledgments**

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