PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS) ON THE CONTROL AND SPREAD OF COVID -19 IN THE NORTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The emergence of COVID -19 pandemic has imposed multiple challenges across the globe. Lockdown measure is one of the strategies employed by the Nigerian government to limit the spread of the pandemic. But the lockdown has increased the long existing precarious situation of the ordinary Nigerians. In response to this, the federal government planned to spend 500 billion naira ($1.2 billion) COVID -19 intervention fund and also proposed to create a 50 billion naira ($163 million) fund to fight and reduce the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Nigerians. But preliminary study indicates that the COVID -19 palliative measures have been politicized. The research adopted mixed method research design utilized both qualitative and quantitative data. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized. Findings of the research shows that government and NGOs' COVID -19 palliative intervention measures have not adequately reduced public suffering amidst of COVID -19 pandemic in Northwestern Nigeria. Findings of the research shows that government and NGOs' COVID -19 palliative intervention measures have not sufficiently reduced public suffering amidst of COVID -19 pandemic in Northwestern Nigeria. The research recommended that more coordinated efforts should be enhance among all tiers of government and NGO toward reducing the spread of COVID- 19.

Key words: Public Perception; Control; COVID -19; Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); Government.

1. Introduction

In recent past, the world has dramatically changed since the discovery of COVID -19 in December 2019. COVID -19 pandemic has led to the deaths and sufferings of the large number of people. To control the spread of the pandemic, the world resolved to serious lockdown (Adenubia, 2020). The magnitude, speed and collapsed of activities due to COVID -19 is unlike anything in the world history. It pushed the world to uncertainty and difficulty. Many countries faced multiple crises ranging from financial crisis and health crisis, hike of commodity prices, loss of lives and jobs, public distrust and resistance to containment measures (UNDP, 2020). These indices continue to change differently in many countries. Thus the economic effect of the pandemic is felt across countries and communities at global level (Ja'afar et al, 2021).

The policy makers responded differently to the situation which includes lockdown, palliative measures and border restrictions etc. But there is considerable uncertainty and difficulties among many people in the post lockdown period especially in developing countries like Nigeria.

In response to the increasing number of index cases, the Nigerian government imposed lockdown measure in the most affected states of Lagos, Ogun, Kano states and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja where the first incidences occurred. While some states imposed partial lockdown and interstates travel restrictions. Later curfews were imposed in all states of the federation. But, the lockdown has increased the precarious situation on the livelihoods of the ordinary Nigerian. To reduce the difficulties that may be resulted from the lockdown, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched palliative measures for targeted groups (Eranga, 2020). This led the Nigerian government planned to spend 500 billion-naira ($1.2 billion) COVID -19 intervention fund and create a 50 billion naira ($163 million) fund to fight the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in the country's economy (Eboh, 2020, Olurounbi, 2020). Apart from donations received from the foreign countries and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), the Federal government also received donations of N43b from individuals and corporate bodies within the country (Premium Times, Thursday May 21, 2020).
The Federal Government also planned efforts to mitigate the effect of the lockdown on the Nigerians through another palliative measures for particular targeted groups, these include the three months interest holidays for those holding Marketmoni, Farmermoni and Tradermoni loans issued by the Bank of Agriculture, Bank of Industry and the Nigeria Export and Import Bank. The Nigerian President, Mohammad Buhari also directed the distribution of food and cash to 3.6 million 'most vulnerable' households (Eranga, 2020).
This research intend to find out what are the public perceptions on the government' responses to the control and spread of COVID -19 in the North-western Nigeria?. Specifically the research will address the following questions: what are the public perceptions on COVID -19 in the North-western Nigeria?. What is the level of public trust toward world health measures on COVID -19 in the North-western Nigeria?. What are the public perceptions on the Nigerian government and NGOs toward COVID -19 palliative measures in the North-western Nigeria?. These problematic questions were answered by this research.

We discuss why COVID -19 palliative measures have not reduced people's difficulties in the North-western Nigeria. Lastly, we conclude by suggesting some recommendations for improving the efficacy of government palliative responses to public as well as future emergencies that may occur.

This paper is divided into five sections, the first is the introduction followed by public perception on COVID -19 Pandemic in the second section, emergence of COVID -19 in Nigeria and the effects of the lockdown on the Public. Section three is the methodology of the research. Section four presents data drawn from questionnaires; Section five of the research presents findings of the research and drew conclusion and recommendations.

1.2. Public Perception on COVID -19 Pandemic

Limited information about COVID -19 fuelled by media's framing have significantly contributed to irrational behaviours, inequality, xenophobia, exclusion and discrimination (United Nations, 2020). Thus recent study indicate that respondents in US and UK generally had good knowledge of the main modes of transmission and common symptoms of COVID -19, but many participants held numerous misconceptions and ideas circulated on social media (Adesegun et al, 2021:2).

This suggests that people in advanced countries held different conceptions and misconceptions on COVID -19 pandemic.
While online survey study of educated respondents on public attitudes toward COVID -19 pandemic in Nigeria shows that 78% of the participants had exhibited good knowledge of COVID -19 and adopted proper preventive measures. The respondents also expressed positive attitudes toward foreigners and other stigma-prone groups (Adesegun et al, 2021:2). The researchers recommended further studies on other socio demographic groups especially the less educated Nigerians which would capture a clearer picture of the peoples' attitudes and perception regarding COVID -19 pandemic. This coincides with Oleribe, O. et al. (2020) empirical research which assessed public perception on government and its institutions on COVID -19 pandemic in Nigeria, though the research focused on the literate people in the higher institutions of learning neglecting the vast majority of the local communities.

Empirical study in the North-western Nigeria indicates that 78% of the people are aware of the Corona Virus Disease, while 46.94% of the respondents contacted viewed COVID -19 as a biological weapon developed by the Chinese government (NOIPOLLS, 2020). This indicates that though majority of the populace are aware of the presence of COVID -19 pandemic but they believed that the virus is an artificial creation to depopulate Africa. This coincides with Hoechne' (2020) findings which labeled Northern Nigeria with long history of resistance to world health measures as transpired during the last two decades of resistance to polio vaccination exercise, this agrees with widespread suspicions on corrupt politicians who are being perceived by local communities as a chance by some governors to receive federal government funds to COVID -19 affected states. This coincides with Eranga' (2020) research on COVID -19 in Nigeria which found that the federal government palliative measures were trailed with politics.

This research fills this gap and will provide evidence based empirical research on the general public perception on COVID -19 pandemic in the North-western Nigeria.

1.3. Emergence of COVID -19 in Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the largest black nation on earth. But the Nigerian Health system is weak. As such, Nigeria is vulnerable to COVID -19. Evidence to this is the increasing index cases in the country.

On 31st December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) office in China received a report of a pneumonia detected in Wuhan. Following its outbreak on 30th January 2020, the disease was declared as Public Health Emergency of International Concern. On 11th February 2020, WHO named the new coronavirus disease as COVID -19 (WHO, 2020).The Covid-19 pandemic has now spread to over 177 countries (UNDP, 2020).

The first case of COVID -19 in Nigeria was recorded on 25th of February 2020 by an Italian who flew into Lagos from Milan, Italy. Two additional cases were detected, a contact of the index case and a woman who came on the 13th of March, 2020 from the United Kingdom (Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC), 2020). The figures continued to increase day by day.

Countries all over the globe adopted different approaches as containment measures to curtail the spread of the pandemic; these include the lock-downs or travel bans. While other containment measures such as mandatory face covering and school closures have generated controversies

among groups with diverse perceptions (Kessa, Sadiq, Yeo, 2020). To control the spread of COVID -19 pandemic and mitigate its impact on the Nigerian citizens, the Presidential Task Force on COVID -19 was established by President Muhammadu Buhari on the 9th March, 2020 with the mandate to coordinate the country's multi-sectoral, intergovernmental efforts (Adesegun et al, 2021:2).

The North West is one of six geopolitical zones in Nigeria and consist of seven (7) of the thirty six (36) states of the federation. These states are Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina, Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa. The area covers 216,065 and equivalent to 25% of the total Nigeria's land mass (International Crisis Group, 2020).

1.4. Effects of the Lockdown on the Public

A Large range of social distancing policies were adopted across the glove. Some countries resolved to lock down, while others adopted voluntary self-compliance measures (Brodeur, Gray, Islam, Bhuiyan, 2020). The lock down measure in Nigeria has imposed difficulties to access of essential goods. People were only allowed to buy limited essential goods at their immediate environment since only essential businesses were permitted to operate. This has significantly affected peoples' socioeconomic activities during the lockdown period.

Secondly the lockdown has reduced economic output and income of many people in the area due to inability of the large number of people to work and earn an income. This has direct impact on demand and supply of some essential goods and services. This coupled with the fact that majority of the populace in the area relied on daily income for their survival (Etukudoh, 2020).

2.1. Method

This section presents methods adopted in generating data, the population of the study, instruments used, sampling size as well as method of data analysis.

2.2.1. Population of the Study

The study is conducted in the Northwestern geopolitical zone in the Northern Nigeria. Three states were selected from six states in the Northwest geopolitical zone; the choice of the selected states is due to high incidence of COVID -19 in the three states. These states are: Kano, Kaduna and Katsina states. The 2006 population census puts the populations of the three states as follows: Kano state has a population of 9,401,288 with an area of 20,131 km² Area followed by Kaduna with population of 6,113,503 with an area of 46,053 km² and Katsina with population of 5,801,584 occupying an area of24, 192 km². The total population of the three states according to 2006 census is 21, 316,375 while the 2016 projection is 29,160, 570 (NPC, 2006; NBS, 2006).

2.2.2. Sample Size

The sample size of the population was obtained using Yamane's (1967; 886) formula as expressed by Israel (1992;1 – 10):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size, N = total population = 21, 316,375, e = level of significance = (95%), n = 21, 316,375 /1+21, 316,375 (95%), = 21, 316,376 (0.0025) = 53,290.94, = 21, 316,375/53292.94, = 399.984. = Approximately 400.

2.2.3. Study Instrument and Administration.
Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized. In the case of primary source, questionnaires were designed to elicit responses from members of the public. Both open and close ended questionnaires were used. For the secondary source, both academic and non-academic materials were exploited. Journal publications, unpublished materials and newspapers were utilized.

To ensure reliability, questionnaire was to pretested and subjected to reliability test. Preliminary investigation was made in Zaria Local Government Kaduna State to ascertain the reliability of the instrument and to suit the objectives of the study.
Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized. In the case of primary source, questionnaires were designed to elicit responses from members of the public. Both open and close ended questionnaires were used. For the secondary source, both academic and non-academic materials were exploited. Journal publications, unpublished materials and newspapers were utilized.

Questionnaires were designed to answer questions on public perceptions on the NGO and world health measures on COVID -19 in the Northwestern Nigeria, public perceptions on COVID -19 in the Northwestern Nigeria and public responses on Government palliative measures during the COVID -19 Lockdown. Questionnaires were administered with the help of research assistance.

Questions on public perception were designed using a 5-point Likert scale. Questionnaires were administered randomly to sampled respondents in the three states selected. The sample and population of the study was drawn from the sample of respondents in three states in the Northwestern Nigeria.
2.3.1. The scope of the study was restricted to Northwestern Nigeria. The choice of the Northwestern Nigeria is because of the long existing resistance to Global health measures, poor healthcare system in the region and recent reactions by the religious clerics and members of the public to government responses to COVID -19. The research covers period within year 2020. The period represents the era of emergence and spreads of COVID -19 in Nigeria and the increasing mixed reactions on the pandemic. The study concentrates on public perception on the control and spread of COVID -19 in the Northwestern Nigeria.
The rational for chosen northwestern Nigeria is due to the presence of poor healthcare system in the region and reactions by the religious clerics and members of the public to COVID -19. There are also differing perceptions regarding immunization in the Northwestern Nigeria particularly due to scandalous field trial of drug by Pfizer in Kano in 1996 which led to the deaths and deformities of some children.
COVID -19 is among the new issues that have attracted global concern. As such there is dearth need of scholarship contributions especially in the developing countries where they have lately contacted the disease. This research will add to the existing few studies on COVID -19 in the Northern Nigeria.
2.3.2. Method of Data Analyses
Data gathered was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Quantitative data was analyzed using simple percentage.

3. Results

This section presents result of the questionnaires administered randomly to respondents in Kano, Kaduna and Katsina states. Each table presents responses in figures and percentage, a brief explanation of the table is followed.

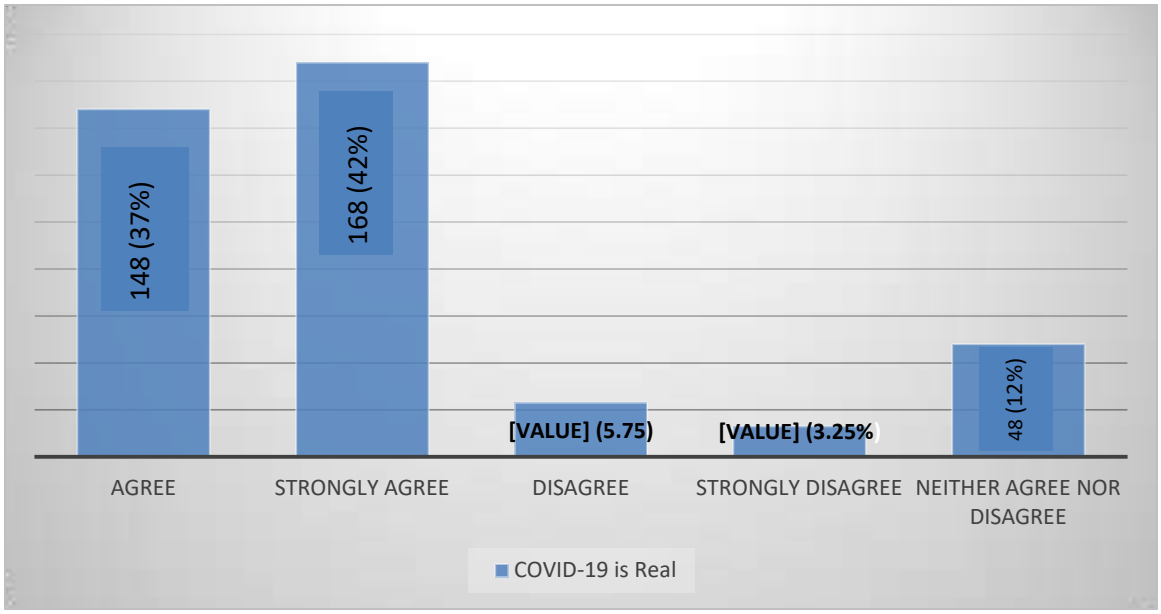
Table 1: Public Perception on COVID -19 in the North-western Nigeria

Variables	Responses	Responses	%
COVID -19 is real.	Agree	148	37.00
	Strongly agree	168	42.00
	Disagree	23	5.75
	Strongly disagree	13	3.25
	Neither agree nor disagree	48	12.00
	Total	400	100

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2021

Respondents were asked to express their views whether or not COVID -19 is real. The result in 1 shows that 148 (37.00%) agree that COVID -19 is real, 168 (42.00%) of the respondents strongly agree that COVID -19 is real. While 23 (5.7%) and 13 (3.25%) of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree respectively. Whereas 48 (12.00%) neither agree nor disagree. This indicates that majority of the respondents 316 (79%) either agree or strongly agree that COVID -19 is real. The result in table 1 can also be presented in form of bar chart as shown in figure 1. The result indicated that more than 70% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that COVID -19 is real. While about 9% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that COVID-19 is real. The remaining 12% of the respondents remained undecided.

Figure 1: Public Perception on COVID -19 in the North-Western Nigeria



Source: Researcher's Survey, 2021

Table 2: Public Perception on World Health Measures on COVID -19 in the North-western Nigeria

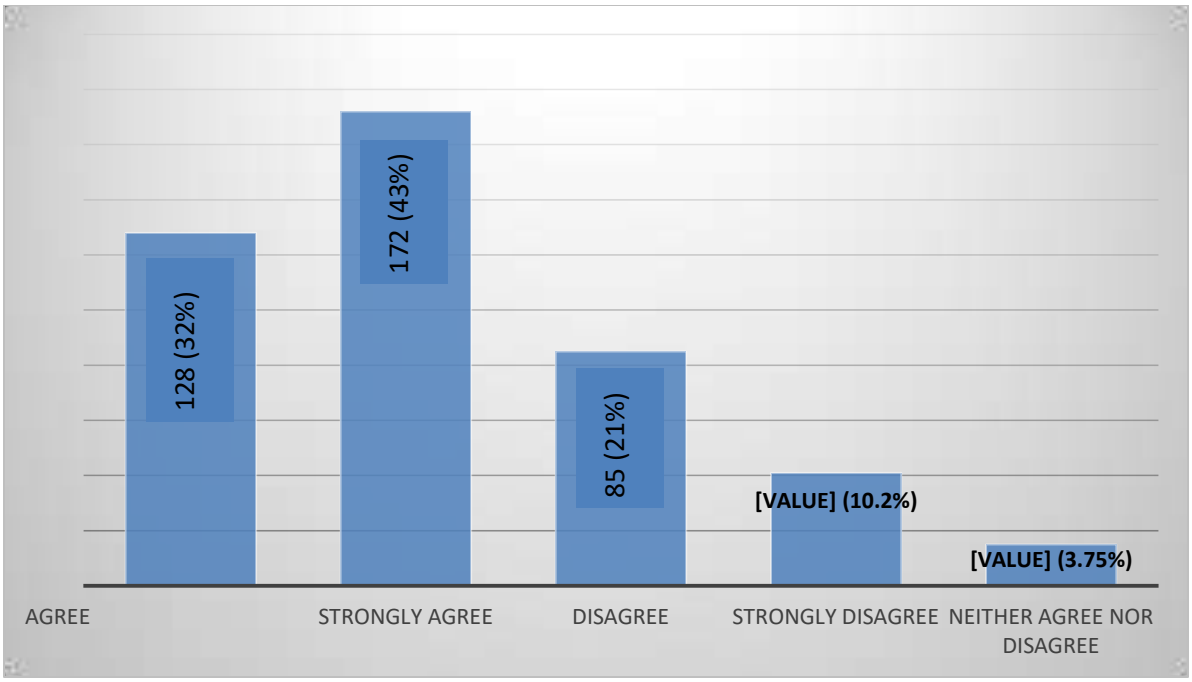
Variables	Responses	Responses	%
COVID -19 is a biological weapon created by some Countries to depopulate Africa and other developing Countries	Agree	128	32.00
	Strongly agree	172	43.00
	Disagree	85	21.00
	Strongly disagree	41	10.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	15	3.75
	Total	400	100

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2021

Table 2 presents respondents' views on whether or not COVID -19 is a biological weapon created by some Countries to depopulate Africa and other developing Countries. 128 (32.00%) and 172 (43%) of the respondents agree and strongly agree respectively. 85(25%) and 41 (10.2%) of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree respectively. 3.75 of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the view that COVID -19 is a biological weapon created by some Countries to depopulate Africa and other developing Countries. This suggests that majority of the respondents are of the view that COVID -19 is a biological weapon created by some Countries to depopulate Africa and other developing Countries. People in the Northwestern Nigeria have differing opinion on COVID -19.

The result in table 2 can also be presented in form of bar chart as shown in figure 2. The result indicated that more than 70% of the respondents perceived that COVID -19 is a biological weapon created by some countries to depopulate Africa and other developing countries. While about 31% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with that perception. The remaining 3.75% of the respondents remained undecided.

Figure 2: Public Perception on World Health Measures on COVID -19 in the North-Western Nigeria



Source: Researcher's Survey, 2021

In table 3 respondents were asked to express their opinion on the role on mitigating the spread of COVID -19 or/and reducing the people's suffering in the Northwestern Nigeria**.** 41 (10.2%) of the respondents agree that WHO and UNICEF have been playing important role in that regard, while 62 (15%) strongly agree. But 121(30.2%) disagree, whereas 138 (34.5%) of the respondents strongly disagree. 38 (9.5%) of the respondents neither agree nor disagree. This means that majority of the respondents in the selected states are not satisfied with the activities of WHO and UNICEF in terms of mitigating the spread of COVID -19 or/and reducing the people's suffering in the Northwestern Nigeria.

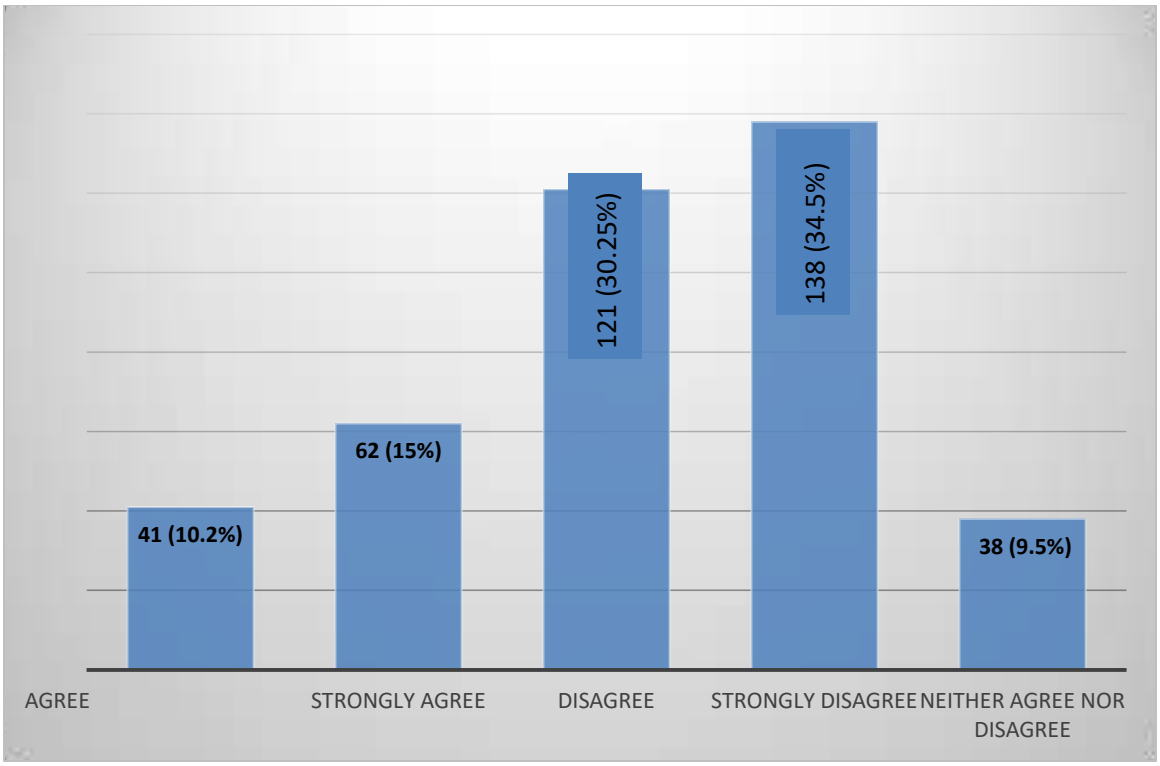
Table 3: Public perception on the WHO and UNICEF on COVID -19 in the North-western Nigeria

Variables	Responses	Responses	%
WHO and UNICEF have been playing important role on mitigating the spread of COVID -19 or/and reducing the people's suffering in your Community	Agree	41	10.2
	Strongly agree	62	15
	Disagree	121	30.25
	Strongly disagree	138	34.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	38	9.5
	Total	400	100

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2021.

The result in table 3 can also be presented in form of bar chart as shown in figure 3. The result indicated that about 65% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that WHO, UNWHO and UNICEF have been playing important role on mitigating the spread of COVID -19 in their Community. While about 25% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with that perception. The remaining 9.5% of the respondents remained undecided.

Figure 3: Public perception on the WHO and UNICEF on COVID -19 in the North-Western Nigeria



Source: Researcher's Survey, 2021

In table 4 respondents were asked whether or not if they have received adequate government palliative measures during the COVID -19 Lockdown. 137 (34%) of the respondents contacted disagree that they had received adequate palliative measures from government, while 168 (42.00%) of the respondents strongly disagree that they had received adequate COVID -19 palliative measures from government during the lockdown. 23 (5.75%) agree and 17 (4.25%) of the respondents disagree that they had received adequate government palliative measures during the COVID -19 Lockdown. 55(13.75%) of the respondents neither agree nor disagree. This indicate that majority of the respondents contacted are of the view that government has not provided adequate palliative measures during the COVID -19 Lockdown in the Northwestern Nigeria.

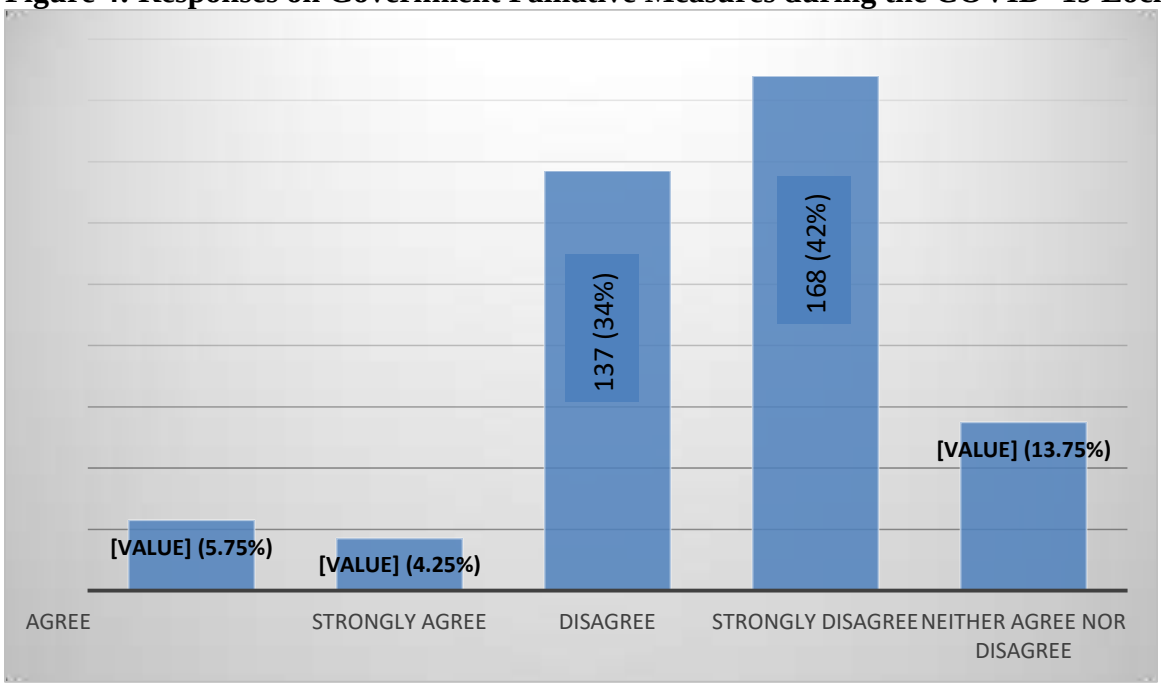
Table 4: Responses on Government Palliative Measures during the COVID -19 Lockdown

Variables	Responses	Responses	%
Government has provided adequate palliative measures during the COVID -19 Lockdown in your Community.	Agree	23	5.75
	Strongly agree	17	4.25
	Disagree	137	34.00
	Strongly disagree	168	42.00
	Neither agree nor disagree	55	13.75
	Total	400	100

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2021.

The result in table 4 can also be presented in form of bar chart as shown in figure 4. The result indicated that about 65% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that Government has provided adequate palliative measures during the COVID -19 lockdown in their community. While only 10% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with that perception. The remaining 13.75% of the respondents remained undecided.

Figure 4: Responses on Government Palliative Measures during the COVID -19 Lockdown



Source: Researcher's Survey, 2021

Discussion of Major Findings

This study aimed at examining public perception on Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on the control and spread of COVID -19 in the Northwestern Nigeria. Specifically the study assesses public perception in the study area on whether or not COVID -19 is real, the study also assesses whether or not WHO and UNICEF have been playing important role on mitigating the spread of COVID -19 or/and reducing the people's suffering in the Northwestern Nigeria. The study also assesses public perception on whether or not COVID -19 is a biological weapon created by some Countries to depopulate Africa and other developing Countries, and finally whether or not Government has provided adequate palliative measures during the COVID -19 Lockdown in the Northwestern Nigeria.

The study found that in spite of the limited knowledge about COVID -19 among the Nigerians, majority of the respondents contacted were of the view that "COVID -19 is real". This means that both educated and less educated citizens in the Northwestern Nigeria are aware of the COVID -19 pandemic considering the fact that 316 (79%) out of 400 (100%) respondents contacted have either agree or strongly agree that "COVID -19 is real". However this is not to say that there are no other perceptions attached to the presence of COVID -19 in Nigeria, Africa or developing Countries.

The research further established that majority of people in the Northwestern Nigeria held the view that 'COVID -19 is a biological weapon created by some Countries to depopulate Africa and other developing Countries'. Evidence to this proved that 300 (75%) of the respondents contacted have this opinion. This means that there are differing views on World Health measures on COVID -19 in the Northwestern Nigeria. It is important to note that Northern Nigeria has

long differing views on World Health measures particularly due to Pfizer vaccine test incidence in Kano state Nigeria which caused deaths and deformities of children in the state.

The results also shows that majority of the respondents in the Northwestern Nigeria are of the view that government has not provided adequate palliative measures during the COVID -19 Lockdown. This indicates that in spite of the number of government palliative measures, many people in the Northwestern Nigeria 'have not accessed it'. This suggests that there was inadequate palliative measures considering the increasing level of poverty and population of the geopolitical zone or the palliative measures have been politicized. This assertion coincides with Eranga's (2020) findings.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study conclude that though majority of the people in the Northwestern Nigeria are aware of the existence of COVID -19 pandemic, but limited knowledge of COVID -19 has divided people's opinions on the efforts of the World Health Measures, Government and Nongovernmental organizations in mitigating the spread and control of the pandemic. This perception was premised from the wide spread of social media information and misinformation, coupled with the limited knowledge about the pandemic and the incidence of field trial of drug by Pfizer in Kano in 1996 which caused the deaths and deformities of some children. Thus this suggests that this perception is still and will remain in the minds of many Nigerians most especially people in the Northwestern Nigeria.

Government should ensure that COVID- 19 palliative measures reaches grassroots communities.

WHO and UNICEF should improve their efforts toward mitigating the spread of COVID -19 and reducing the people's suffering by providing adequate goods and services to local communities.

More coordinated efforts should be enhance among all tiers of government and NGO toward reducing the spread of COVID- 19. This can be achieved by outlining the critical gaps and ensuring possible solution, by ensuring that we have effective systems in place for early warning and response for routine outbreaks of COVID- 19 pandemics and other epidemics.

There is need to draw lessons from other countries by trying to design homegrown responses. This can be achieved by trying efforts to reduce the spread of the disease. This can be attained by implementing mitigation and suppression measures in a manner that is culturally and economically pleasant to the Nigerian environment.

Efforts should be made toward enhancing public sensitization on COVID- 19. This can be achieved by enhancing sensitization in social media and public places.

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