

Nigerian Communities Still Doubt COVID-19, Say Broadcasters



As the Corona Virus pandemic gains foothold in the community amidst rising figures and death toll globally, Nigerians at the grassroots are yet to accept the reality of the viral disease, according to reports by broadcast journalists in the country.

As at Friday, July 9, 2020, National Center for Disease Control, NCDC, confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country stood at 30,748, with 12,546 discharged and 689 deaths recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The current figure is a rapid growth in two and half months considering that as at April 27, there were 1095 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Nigeria with 208 cases discharged and only 32 deaths.

In a virtual roundtable organized by the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition and the Institute for Media and Society, IMS, on June 30, with the theme Community Journalism in The Covid-19 Period, community radio broadcasters in the country identified this refusal to face reality as one of the daunting challenges facing them during coverage and reportage on the COVID-19 pandemic at the grassroots.

Making contributions to the sub- topic on COVID-19 Preventive Measures, which was moderated by Dr Abiodun Ogidan of Unilag Radio, the participants were unanimous that many Nigerians at the communities are yet to believe that COVID-19 is real, despite ongoing enlightenment campaigns on the viral pandemic.

According to Mr. Olusegun Ajileye of Igbomina Community Radio in Kwara State, North Central Nigeria, efforts to enlighten the people through creative jingles, drama series and everyday reportorial updates and news on COVID-19 are yet to make a dent in the beliefs of the people.

He said; "We produce a series of jingles on COVID-19 increase and precautions in Igbomina dialect. Transcripts from the jingles of the National Center for Disease Control, NCDC, have also been made in the local dialect. Drama series for the people to adhere to government approved precautionary measures are broadcast to create awareness

everyday. Still, many believe there is nothing called Corona Virus despite our awareness campaigns."

For Usman Buhari of Haske FM from Kebbi State, North West Nigeria, the low case of infection recorded in the state has compounded the problem of disbelief among the people. "The state has not imposed lockdown so there is denial of the existence of the virus even though we have produced pre-recorded jingles on COVID-19 in Hausa which we broadcast."

Even the stations, which have tried to overcome this challenge by intensifying sensitization campaign through obliging, respected, traditional and religious leaders, still face an uphill task.

On this Meshach Yohanna, of Agro FM, in Shendam, Plateau State, offered an insight.

"Any time we go into the community to sensitize the people with traditional and religious leaders who we wrote to for help, the people believe we are part of the government who they claim is deceiving them. They say the disease is not true"

On this segment of the programme, Dr Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of the IMS, one of the organisers of the virtual conference,

“ So many messages form the NCDC is generic and will have very little impact with no compliance. Re-education and communication coverage has to be audience specific. It is important we do that and give the people a particular direction. ”

urged the participants as reporters on the field to be the first responders to suggest methods they intend to adopt in overcoming the problem before he invited suggestions from some of the invited guests.

Mr. Agi Marvin of Agba Community Radio in Benue State, North-central Nigeria, replied that apart from intensifying the ongoing sensitization efforts through jingles and drama series, they had to broaden their scope by entering into a partnership with West Africa Democratic Radio with focus on COVID-19, while Omogbeniyi Lot of 93.7 FM, Igbodigo in Ondo State, Southwest Nigeria, said apart from airing programmes where prominent people come to sensitize the people, " we have programmes of the people, which we air for the them."

Chief Ogbu Ego, also of Agba Community Radio said one of the method adopted by the management of the station is the use of stage drama to communicate with the people through the 276 representative associations that support the station.

Offering a suggestion, Mrs. Idayat Alimi, a community radio advocate, who praised the stations for doing well in respect of advocacy said the major problem is that many people in and out of the community, do not believe in COVID-19 and suggested, "we may need to increase media advocacy."

In his contribution, Mr Obinna Chukwuezie, a community radio advocate, urged the stations to be more creative and imaginative with their programmes. "So many messages from the NCDC is generic and will have very little impact with no compliance. Re-education and communication coverage has to be audience specific. It is important we do that and give the people a particular direction."

Ogidan suggested that radio stations might have to specialize and " look for something communities would embrace and define content towards that..."

NUJ To Police: Release Our Chairman And Apologise For His Unwarranted Arrest

The Nigeria Union of Journalists, NUJ, Ebonyi State council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, NUJ has demanded the unconditional release of its Chairman Mr. Tony Nwize who was arrested by armed gunmen in police uniform on Saturday.

The union in a statement signed by the Vice-Chairman, Comrade Benjamin Nworie in a statement in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State capital, said the police should in addition to his release apologise for the unwarranted arrest. The statement reads "We received a distress call from the wife of chairman of the council, Mrs. Joy Tony Nwizi, that armed squad stormed their residence in Abakaliki at about 6:30am on Saturday and whisked her husband, Comrade Tony Nwizi away.

"According to sketchy information given by the squad, the arrest was said to be a directive from the Inspector General of Police over an undisclosed petition against the Ebonyi NUJ chairman.

"The council, therefore, notes with dismay that the gestapo arrest of the chairman in such brazen violation of his fundamental human rights is highly condemnable.

"It's more worrisome and embarrassing as the sting operation was sketchy to the Ebonyi State Police Command, whose disposition to the incident when some members of the Union visited the command gave no hope on the true identity and purpose of the arrest.

"The unfortunate arrest of Comrade Tony Nwizi is highly condemnable worsened by the fact that his arrest was shrouded by uncertainties as officers on duty at the Area command actually confirmed that the armed squad refused to identify themselves or present warrant of arrest.

"This ugly development fueled suspicion that it was a clear case of abduction. "Ebonyi State Council of NUJ condemn the gestapo arrest of our chairman, comrade Tony Nwizi and therefore call for his immediate release," the statement added.

Journalists Barred As Panel Grills Magu In Aso Rock

Journalists have been barred from covering the ongoing investigation of the acting Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes (EFCC), Ibrahim Magu, a panel set up to

investigate alleged infractions against him.

The panel is sitting at the Conference Centre of the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Journalists who had arrived to cover the event at about 3.20 pm, were denied access by security personnel.

"They said you people should excuse the use of this place for today," a security official detailed to the venue, politely told reporters.

Magu was reportedly arrested by the Department of State Security (DSS), in Abuja, on Monday and has since then be undergoing investigation by the panel headed by former President of the Nigeria Court of Appeal, Justice Ayo Salami.

This followed allegations that he owns four properties and was allegedly transferring funds abroad through a third party.

Continental (TVC) and Mrs. Victoria Ojito of Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)

They were attacked in the early hours of Thursday at their residence at Sabon-Gari, Lafia, the Nasarawa State capital.

The Nasarawa State Director of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Mrs. Priscilla Gondo-Alour, was also attacked during the criminal operation in the area.

Agwam told NAN that the suspects stormed the compound at about 2:00 a.m., forced their way into his apartment and took their laptop, mobile phones and cash from the wife's business.

He added that the robbers also visited six other houses in the area and injured one during their operation.

Also, Mrs. Victoria Ojito of NTA narrating her experiences said the robbers broke her door, carted away her money and some valuables.

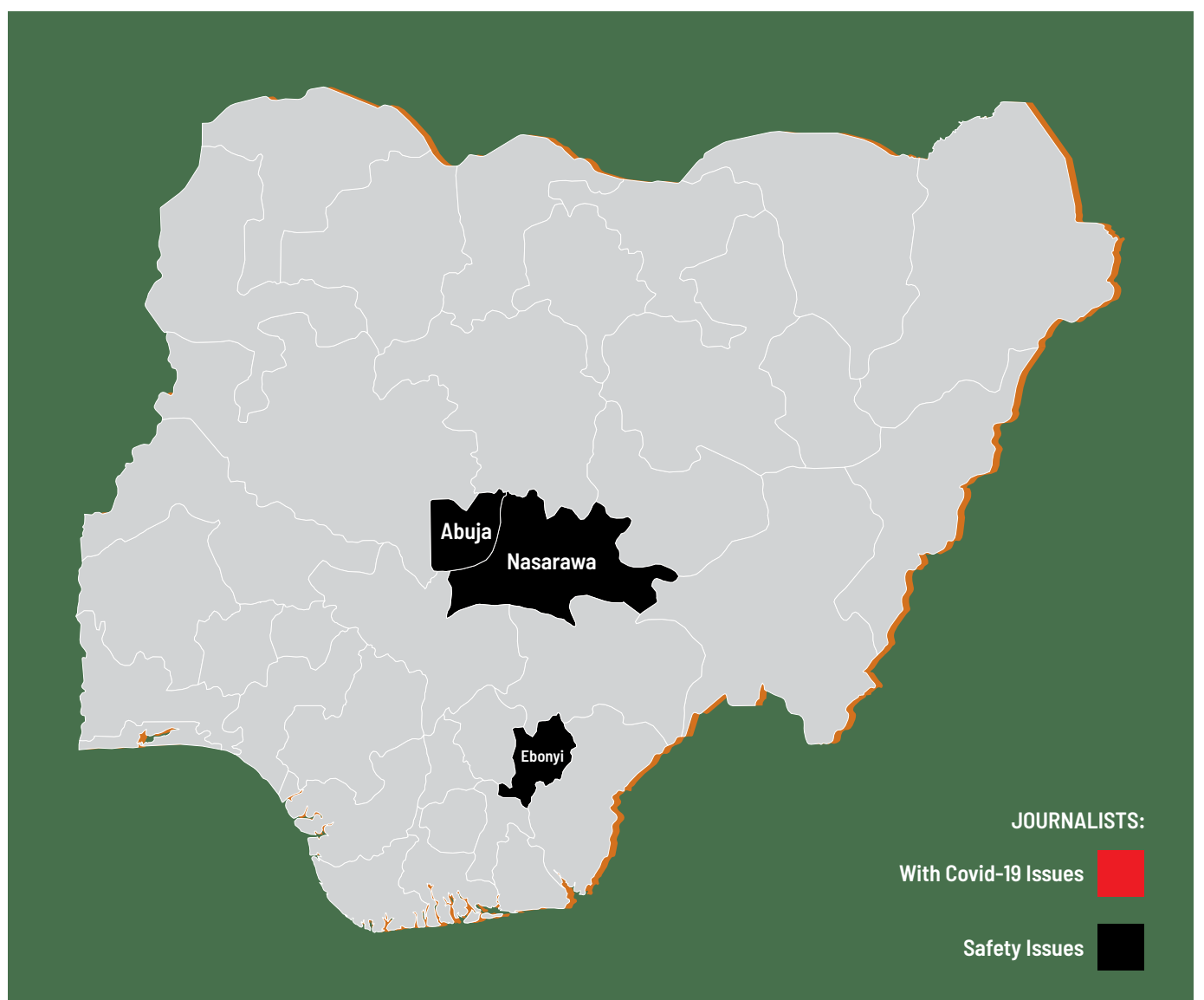
Confirming the incident, Mr. Bola Longe, Commissioner of Police (CP) in the state, promised that the suspects would be arrested.

Longe, during a patrol of the area, said that the force would not relent in its onslaught against criminals in the state.

He advised members of the public to be vigilant and report suspicious movements and individuals to the police for prompt action.

Robbers Attack NTA, TVC Correspondents in Nasarawa

Suspected armed robbers on Thursday attacked Mr. Godwin Agwam, Nasarawa State Correspondent of the Television





The NBC's New Code Strangulates Business, Says Wole Soyinka

Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka has described the National Broadcasting Code 6 as economic sabotage writ large, directed against thousands of practitioners.

According to him, the government has recently declared war on the arts and its producers with the recent action of NBC and the stand by the Minister of Sports and Youth Development on loading of books in a new free-loading portal.

He said: "I think it is about time the government comes out openly and admits that it has declared war against the Arts and its producers, instead of its present tactics of piecemeal attrition. Just when we were reeling from the action of the Ministry of Youth and Development in joining hands with book pirates by providing a free-loading portal for the works of Nigerian authors, among others, along comes a new regulatory hit against the cinema and video enterprise, and its operators. Let me quickly utilise the opening of this new flank to commend the director-general of the Nigerian Copyright Commission for his prompt attention to the complaint by Nigerian authors."

While noting that some of the regulations are well intentioned, he however expressed distrust for, "unintended consequences such as backhanded censorship in the age of digital media and... the restricted intellectual property rights and their scope of exploitation with whomsoever one chooses to collaborate."

"Several practitioners' voices have been raised in protest. For one such insider's detailed and passionate exposition on the deleterious provisions of this Code, I shall draw particular attention of policy makers to Chris Ihidero's "Why Does the NBC

Want to Kill Local Content in Nigeria?" If I may invoke a contemporary tragic image to render graphically what Ihidero and others have pleaded on behalf of both creators and consumers of this artistic productivity: Let government kindly take its knee off the neck of this industry. Please – let it breathe!"

NBC Code: Group Seeks More Input From Stakeholders

A group, Coalition of Civil Society for Citizen's Action against Covid-19, has thrown its weight behind the ongoing reform in the broadcasting sector with the new National Broadcasting Code.

While it canvassed the engagement of stakeholders in the implementation of the new code, it noted that the regulation would rebrand the nation's broadcast industry.

Amb. Splendour Agbonkpolor, National Coordinator of the group called on the Nigeria Broadcasting Commission, NBC, to organise forums for stakeholders to make recommendations to strengthen the code "so it won't frustrate the ongoing investments in the broadcasting sector."

He said; "We advocate for more engagements by stakeholders in the implementation of the new code which seeks to give the Nigerian government more control over broadcasting platforms not yet under government control like Internet TV and radio."

He said that having read some of

the strong and salient oppositions from some concerned stakeholders on some sections of the code that tend to break the monopoly currently enjoyed by some foreign broadcasting stations and allow local contents development in our media operations, the group chose to call on the Nigeria Broadcasting Commission to organise forums for stakeholders to make recommendations to strengthen the code for ongoing investments in the broadcasting sector.

"The NBC new code makes it mandatory for broadcast media to ensure that 70% of their productions are local content base, thereby creating an avenue to stimulate local investors in the content development sector and giving more opportunities to local producers and filmmakers. This is a welcome development and a big investment opportunity to NOLLYWOOD," he said, adding "With the advent of digital technology, the broadcasting sector has been undergoing significant technological and structural changes which have given Nigerian consumers access to a great variety of communications and media services.

“Why Does the NBC Want to Kill Local Content in Nigeria?” If I may invoke a contemporary tragic image to render graphically what Ihidero and others have pleaded on behalf of both creators and consumers of this artistic productivity: Let government kindly take its knee off the neck of this industry. Please - let it breathe!



Professor Armstrong Idachaba, Acting Director General of NBC

FG Grants Broadcast Stations 60% Debt Forgiveness

...As NBC Pledges to Implement Pay-As-You-Go policy on Cable Tariff

The federal government has announced its readiness to grant 60 per cent debt forgiveness for all debtor broadcast stations in the country as part of efforts to ensure they are financially sustainable.

The Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, who announced the debt forgiveness during a press briefing in Abuja yesterday, also hinted that the National Broadcasting Corporation, NBC, has been directed to grant two-month license-fee waiver to terrestrial broadcast stations in the country as part of efforts to ease the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the broadcast industry.

Mohammed however said that the criterion for enjoying the debt forgiveness is for debtor stations to pay 40 per cent of their existing debt within the next three months.

He stressed that any station that is unable to pay the balance of 40 per cent indebtedness within the three months window shall forfeit the opportunity to enjoy the stated debt forgiveness.

The minister said, "The existing license fee is further discounted by 30 per cent for all Open Terrestrial Radio and Television services effective 10 July, 2020

"The debt forgiveness shall apply to functional licensed Terrestrial Radio and Television stations only. The debt forgiveness and discount shall not apply to pay TV service operators."

He noted the effective date of the debt forgiveness shall be 10 July, 2020 to 6 October, 2020.

The information minister said the federal government made the interventions with a view to repositioning the broadcast Industry to play its critical role in promoting democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

He recalled that on May 6, 2020, he received officials and other representatives of the Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria, BON, who made a comprehensive presentation on the effects of the pandemic on the industry and sought critical interventions by federal and state governments.

Mohammed said the Post-COVID-19 Initiatives Committee for the Creative

Industry, which was set up to help mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on the creative industry as a whole, has submitted its report, which contained recommendations that will benefit all component parts of the larger creative industry.

He stated: "However, without prejudice to those recommendations, I want to announce today a number of Broadcast Industry-specific measures aimed at giving a lifeline to the industry which, though largely a business, continues to function as a critical social service of sorts, which is relevant to the information and enlightenment needs of the people. "These measures are in addition to the two-month license-fee waiver granted to terrestrial broadcast stations in the country by the NBC, as part of efforts to ease the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the broadcast industry

"Against this background, the management of the NBC has therefore recommended, and the federal government has accepted, the following measures to revamp the Broadcast Industry and to help reposition it for the challenges of business, post-COVID-19".

Mohammed further noted that pay-as-you-go was workable in the country.

According to him, StarTimes is operating it already, adding that he has already asked the acting DG NBC to do the needful.

Also speaking the acting director-general of the NBC, Prof Armstrong Idachaba, said the NBC would review its code in the next two years, assuring that the commission will follow due process.

He said the commission does not want a situation where there would be a monopoly leading to the exclusion of others, noting that the process will be all encompassing.

On the issue of pay-as-you-go, he said Nigeria has been soft on that.

He stated, "If it is implemented, Nigerians will not be charged for services they did not consume. As a regulator, we are going to enforce it.

"Service providers stand to gain more on pay-as-you-go since more people will subscribe to it."

According to the National

Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country has seriously affected the revenue base of many of the broadcast stations to the effect that many of them are indebted to the federal government to the tune of N7.8 billion.

COVID-19 Palliatives for Print Media Underway, Says FG

The reprieve that came the way of radio and television owners in Nigeria when the federal government Monday announced a 60 percent slash in the outstanding N7.8 billion debt owed government by the broadcast media organisations, would soon come to the door-steps of troubled print media.

Minister of Information and Culture Lai Mohammed who announced this at a media parley in Abuja, with Director-General National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, Prof. Armstrong Idachaba also in attendance, said a similar gesture for the print media was underway, as engagement was still on with newspaper owners.

When asked why similar gesture had yet to be extended to the print media, the minister recalled his meeting with the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), saying engagement was still on.

According to him, the presidential directive was not limited to the broadcast industry.

He said: "We are still engaging them (NPAN). We asked for certain documents to be submitted. I am waiting for certain information. I am still speaking to the CBN governor, but like I said, engagement is on.

But let me say here that even at that, the situation is different because newspapers don't pay renewal licence fee."



Lai Mohammed, Minister of Information and Culture

Editor's Note

It is one thing to be in trouble. It is another to know where to turn to for support or relief.

Faced with the unthinkable choice between business closure and staying afloat as the lockdown, curfew, restricted movement and general uncertainty regarding COVID-19 pandemic wrecks havoc on an already troubled media industry, media owners and managers cried out to the government for financial support recently.

What does this entail for media independence, particularly the private media? Would the media still be able to maintain editorial judgment if and when it gets the sought funds? What terms should govern the release and management of the fund? Should be it in the form of a grant or a loan? These are some of the questions that a panel of stakeholders addressed in a media tweet chat recently. It is as topical as it is a must read.

The contentious NBC code has become a byword for economic sabotage. That is the expression used by the Nobel Laureate, Prof Wole Soyinka in a statement during the week.

Coupled with the split in the Commission between the Board and management over the code, it is safe to say its implementation will be dodged by controversy as the Commission's management has refused to throw it open for further debate by interest groups. We bring you full details of Soyinka's apt summation of the perilous road taken by the code.

Is it time for embattled media houses in the country to smile? May be. Struggling to sustain production in an already hostile economic climate, the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic has impacted media houses to induce lay-off, forced leave and downsizing for many to stay afloat. With the pledge by government to extend some form of assistance, the sad story may change to one of joy, soon.

The Federal Government during the week announced the extension debt forgiveness to broadcast stations and its preparation to lend a hand to the print media as well, once the necessary papers are submitted and processed. Find the details of this long awaited lifeline on our stories on policy and regulation.

Nigerian Journalists seem to be besieged everywhere they turn these days. Robbers attack them. Kidnappers hunt them. Government officials prevent them from doing their job. Police harass them. Check out the stories inside.


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NCDC Confirmed COVID-19 Cases by State, July 10, 2020

States Affected	No. of Cases (Lab Confirmed)	No. of Cases (on admission)	No. Discharged	No. of Deaths
Lagos	11,827	9,993	1,701	133
FCT	2,365	1,621	709	35
Oyo	1,604	751	834	19
Edo	1,562	580	925	57
Delta	1,337	852	454	31
Kano	1,302	220	1,030	52
Rivers	1,294	407	843	44
Ogun	1,063	346	695	22
Kaduna	907	294	601	12
Katsina	646	182	441	23
Ondo	606	462	124	20
Borno	584	94	455	35
Gombe	524	116	387	21
Bauchi	519	8	498	13
Ebonyi	503	0	497	6
Plateau	497	242	241	14
Enugu	439	162	263	14
Abia	401	133	265	3
Imo	359	290	61	8
Jigawa	318	0	308	10
Kwara	311	131	168	12
Bayelsa	299	141	141	17
Nasarawa	236	115	113	8
Osun	212	121	84	7
Sokoto	153	2	135	16
Akwa Ibom	134	60	71	3
Niger	125	21	97	7
Benue	121	80	35	6
Adamawa	100	22	71	7
Anambra	93	27	57	9
Kebbi	86	16	63	7
Zamfara	76	0	71	5
Yobe	62	3	51	8
Ekiti	46	4	40	2
Taraba	27	16	11	0
Cross River	5	1	3	1
Kogi	5	0	3	2

Highlights

- On the 9th of July 2020, 499 new confirmed cases and 5 deaths were recorded in Nigeria.
- No new state has reported a case in the last 24 hours.
- Till date, 30,748 cases have been confirmed, 12,546 cases have been discharged and 689 deaths have been recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.
- The 499 new cases are reported from 24 states - Lagos (157); Edo (59); Ondo (56); Oyo (31); Akwa Ibom (22); Borno (21); Plateau (19); Kaduna (18); Katsina (18); Bayelsa (17); FCT (17); Delta (14); Kano (11); Rivers (10); Enugu (8); Ogun (6); Kwara (4); Imo (3); Nasarawa (2); Osun (2); Abia (1); Ekiti (1); Niger (1); Yobe (1)