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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COVID-19 IN ETHIOPIA; ITS IMPACT AND RESILIENCE; A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

***Degu Paulos**

Wolaita Sodo University, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

COVID -19 has caused multi-faceted impact globally. Ethiopia's vulnerability to the consequences of the pandemic is more severe compared to developed countries because of problems of responsiveness as the country is poor. This study examined the impact of COVID-19 and resilience strategies used based on information gathered from media outlets and literature. According to the findings, COVID-19 caused economic, social and political impacts in Ethiopia. And resilience mechanisms such as fund raising, declaration of state of emergency, engaging religious leaders in the fight against the pandemic and pardoning prisoners were used.

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INTRODUCTION

The current ongoing pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) has globally affected 213 countries and territories with more than 6.7 million confirmed cases and 397388 of deaths. In Ethiopia currently, there are 1934 confirmed cases and 20 deaths (WHO, 2020). The specificity of coronavirus impact on Ethiopia can be understood based on the internal condition of the country at the time of its outbreak. The COVID-19 outbreak coincided with momentous political change in the country. The country has embarked on political reform. The former ruling party EPRDF has been rebranded and Prosperity Party/PP/ was formed. The advent of the reformist prosperity party to power entails groundbreaking anticipation among the citizenry and the reformists themselves promised so. One of the reform agendas is the policy shift. Most importantly national election which is to be held ones every five years according to the country's constitution is scheduled to be held in May this year. However, because of the plague, the government postponed the election which has produced a dichotomized view from politicians some supporting it others opposing it. The opponents argue that the government is trying to hijack COVID-19 to its political advantage by elongating its tenure. So it is amid this political schism and cynicism that the country faces challenges of the virus. Ethiopia is entangled in two gigantic agendas, fighting COVID -19 and executing reform agendas including national elections accordingly. The national mood swings between these two significant conditions. The national mood in the country during the pandemic is raised because it could shape the fight against coronavirus not because it is not part of the study.

The focus of the research is to examine the impacts of the virus and resilience strategies used. Lose of human life is the prime impact of the virus. However, its impact goes beyond this affecting social, economic, and political situation. This study examines these impacts and resilience strategies used by the government of Ethiopia. Literature and media coverage on the issue were used to gather information.

Coronavirus impact in Ethiopia: The impact posed by COVID-19 can be grouped into three which are political economic and social. All of the three impacts are presented based on the information got from different sources. As the aforementioned literature and media outlets that covered the issue of the virus were used as sores of data.

Economic impact: According to IMF COVID, 19 will contribute to the economic downturn in Ethiopia. It is estimated that annual economic growth will be reduced by 2.9 %. Meanwhile, the Ethiopian government following the pandemic revised its annual economic growth rate and reduced it from an initial target of 9 % to 6.2%. Moreover, the pandemic is expected to contribute monetary mayhem of inflation and volatility of exchange rate and poverty. The aggregate effect of economic contraction will affect the government's revenue (UNICEF, 2020). Similarly (Degye *et al.*,2020) shows Ethiopia cannot escape the economic impact of the pandemic. The likelihood of the IMF's forecast is seen by a sharp drop in revenue in different sectors in the country. Particularly the hospitality sector has been much affected. The Ethiopian tourism industry is shattered by the pandemic. (voyagesafriq, 2020) shows concomitant with Ethiopian

airlines cancellation of flights. Tourist arrival for 2020 will be lower than 849,000 reported in 2018/2019 to less than 600,000. It is expected that problems with tourism will spillover over the hotel industry. Grunder (2020) further testified the problem as: Following the spread of COVID-19 and the subsequent travel restrictions impacting the international travel-tour industry, 88 percent of hotels in Addis Ababa have decided to partially or fully close their doors due to low occupancy rates. The Ethiopian airlines that play a pivotal role as a catalyst of the hospitality sector is hard hit by the pandemic. It has already announced that it has lost USD 550 million because of international flight restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Revenue loss has caused the national carrier to cut 90% of international flights (Bayrau and Tassew, 2020).

The social impact: It is known that the pandemic has wreaked various havoc across the globe and Ethiopia is no exception. The social impact mint by the virus is one of the outspoken repercussions since the pandemic is unraveled. The health sector, cleaning substances, education sector, domestic violence, and child marriage are some of the social issues impacted by the coronavirus

Health sector: As Ethiopia is a poor country health sector lags far behind even compared with sub-Saharan countries such as Kenya. Lack of skilled professionals and infrastructure necessary to deliver quality health services are defining features of the sector's problem (Wamai, 2009). The corona pandemic has worsened the already struggling sector. As the government is expected to gear its full capacity to controlling and treating COVID-19 patients other health services are exposed for disruption. This is indicated by the postponement of polio and measles vaccination. Undoubtedly this will have long term health complications on children who are expected to be vaccinated (UNICEF, 2020)

Cleaning substances: The problems of sanitation and personal hygiene mark Ethiopia's features. Majority of the country's population lack access to modern sanitation facilities and open defecation practiced by so many Ethiopians (Beyene *et al.*, 2015). It's up on this challenge that COVID-19 out broke necessitating sanitation. Coronavirus prevention highly depends on cleaning hands using sanitizer, soap, and other cleaning substances. However, having a weak practice of sanitation and personal hygiene and problems related to the scarcity of cleaning substances it seems challenging to implement hand washing as preventive measures. (World Bank, 2020)

Education: Education in Ethiopia has challenges of both access and quality. Even though there is an improvement in terms of access there are still so many children who cannot access education in the country. Also for those who can access the lack of quality is a mammoth challenge. The corona pandemic has inflicted additional challenge to the sector. School closure as a means of fighting against the spread of the disease will affect the education sector in general and poor and vulnerable groups in particular. As the country is poor it is difficult to catch up with the rest of the world in delivering education using ICT and other modus operandi in this difficult time. However, the problem even worsens when poor and vulnerable children are concerned. They cannot access what the government provides with all its problems (UNICEF 2020).

Domestic violence: Domestic violence is part of the usual social crisis in Ethiopia. It is not a noble issue created by the noble virus. Different sorts of violence such as physical, sexual, and emotional are assaulted against women. According to (Berhane, 2004) 50-60 % of women encounter domestic violence during their lifetime. However, the occurrence of coronavirus pandemic worsened the situation. Measures taken to control the disease such as staying at home and the vulnerability of women economically, politically, and socially compared to their men counterparts paved favorable situations for domestic violence (Grunder, 2020).

Child marriage: Child marriage in Ethiopia is a deep entangled harmful traditional practice. Mainly because of cultural reasons children particularly in northern Ethiopia are vulnerable to this social havoc. UNICEF (2018) entails in this regard, Ethiopia has the worst case of child marriage among countries in eastern and southern Africa. Wuilbercq(2020) states the COVID-19 epidemic aggravated the quandary because of school closure which in turn increased the practice of early marriage. Since the occurrence of the pandemic, 500 girls have rescued from child marriage in northern Ethiopia.

COVID-19 as a double burden for women: In Ethiopia, gender parity implies negativity as far as women are concerned. Women lag almost in every aspect of life. Tefera (2020) in this regard depicts Women are engaged in less paid jobs such as street vending and less educated compared to men counterparts. The outbreak of corona worsened already the vulnerable social economic and political position of women.

Political impact

Postponing national election: Coronavirus has posed multidimensional influences all across the globe. It affects different facets of activities at the individual and governmental levels. One of which is politics. In Ethiopia, because of the virus, the national election .the current tenure of parliament ends as of September 2020 and the Ethiopian constitution article 58(3) states national election must take place at the end of August. The reality however is that because of the pandemic the incumbent government argues election cannot be executed (Maroam, 2020). Postponing the election has polarized politicians in the country. Some supporting it mentioning COVID 19 is a global problem, not the artificial thing created by the ruling party to the extent its tenure while others argue the time COVID 19 becomes under control is unknown it may take too long to contain it.

Resilience mechanisms: The government has been utilizing different resilience mechanisms to overcome the challenges of COVID-19. Economic mobilization, engaging religious leaders in the fight against the virus, entertaining charges of domestic violence as an urgent case, pardoning prisoners, state of the emergency declaration have been used as resilience mechanisms.

Economic mobilization: One of the problems posed by the coronavirus in Ethiopia is economic. To deal with this challenge the government has undertaken different mechanisms as a resilience strategy. Undertaking fundraising activities is to be mentioned among others. So far over \$567 has been fundraised for COVID-19 response (OCHA *et al.*, 2007).

As a poor country, Ethiopia even before the pressing problem of COVID-19 has been reliant on international auspices. Poverty compounded with the pandemic posed urgency of such aide. IMF is among the traditional debtors and supporters of Ethiopia. And its executive committee approved US\$411 to Ethiopia to deal with financial quandary created by the virus (OCHA *et al.*, 2007).

Engaging religious leaders in the campaign against the pandemic: The government is trying to harness the power of religion to bring about attitudinal change among followers. The two dominant religions, Christianity and Islamic leaders were allowed air time in state-owned media to lecture their respective congregation on ways of tackling the pandemic and to prey. Religious groups council called Inter-Religious council of Ethiopia, formed in 2020 to promote tolerance is being exploited to urge believers prey from their homes to control the pandemic (Tesema,2020).

Entertaining charges of domestic violence as an urgent case: Stay at home declaration by the government in a bid to control the pandemic gave rise to unwanted consequences such as domestic violence.to handle this sort of case federal courts have resumed service though they had been closed before in response to COVID-19 (Shaban,2020).

Pardoning prisoners: More than 4000 prisoners were pardoned in an attempt to control the spread of the virus.it is assumed that overcrowding in prisons would exacerbate the possibility of the spread of the pandemic. However,a pardon was decided on the base of terms of sentences. Only those prisoners sentenced less than three years were allowed (Adebayo, 2020).

State of emergency declaration: The Ethiopian constitution endorses the federal government to declare a state of emergency to deal with such crises as the pandemic. Following constitutional right the incumbent government declared a state of emergency to empower itself to better fight against the coronavirus. This gives the government extensive power to take measures to enforce all conditions necessary to contain the virus. (CRISIS GROUP, 2020).

Conclusion

It's obvious that as poor country Ethiopia is hard hit by the virus socially, economically, and uniquely politically as the virus catapulted the postponement of the national election. Resilience strategies to tackle these ramifications as per capability allowed have been concomitantly employed. However, public attention towards mitigating the impact of the virus and protecting itself from the virus ostensibly is not fully won because of the national political mood. The postponement of national elections defining the political mood of the nation currently is a key element in this regard. The government views postponement of national elections as an essential measure because of the pandemic while opposition parties argue it's a mechanism exploited to linger its tenure unconstitutionally. The public's attention swings between these polarized stances hence eventually affecting the effectiveness of mechanisms embarked on to control the spread of the virus. However to have valid information research has to be undertaken on the effectiveness of the government's response towards controlling the pandemic.

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