

NATIONAL NGOs ALLIANCE FOR COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE
(NNGOAC-19PR))

Under the auspices of Foundation for Conservation of Nigerian Rivers

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13th May, 2020

**THE PRESIDENT, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA,
ABUJA, NIGERIA**

**ATTN: THE CHAIRMAN,
PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON COVID -19 PANDEMIC (PTF)
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERATION
SHEHU SHAGARI COMPLEX
THREE ARMS ZONE ABUJA NIGERIA.**

Dear Mr. President,

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE MUST BUILD EQUALITY AND SOLIDARITY

“The current global health and economic crisis is a turning point in human history. Will we allow the conditions that brought this crisis about to continue? OR will we join together in strength and solidarity, to change the systems and circumstances and bring about a healthier and more equitable and sustainable world for everyone?”(President of IFE, April 27, 2020)

We would like to express our sincere thanks to you and your cabinets especially the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Covid-19 and National Center for Diseases Control (NCDC) for the wonderful and excellent efforts they have put in place so far to contain the spread and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our dear Nation-Nigeria. Going by the same spirit and forging ahead in solidarity to win the fight against this dreaded common enemy called Covid -19, NNGOAC-19PR has prepared a Pandemic Response Strategic framework listing the ways in which governments and others must protect the poorest and marginalized communities in our country, hoping that the suggestions contained in this communication will assist the PTF in fine tuning its existing strategies. The report provides strategic framework that is required to formulate any policy and program by government and others to cushion the adverse impacts and consequences of the pandemic and its aftermath. The communication brings together ideas that were crowd-sourced from across our network around the globe along with expert inputs coordinated by Initiative for Equality (IFE) USA. Since the report is a living document, it shall be updated periodically to accommodate new research findings and facts.

The Pandemic Response We Envisaged in Nigeria.

The social, economic and health impacts of the current coronavirus pandemic are playing out along the fault lines of our societies’ massive inequalities – of wealth, access to resources and services, ability to influence decision-making, freedom from external domination and warfare, and

environmental justice. The consequences of the pandemic also make clear why human societies cannot succeed without undoing the damage caused by these inequalities, including violent conflict, widespread poverty, inadequate or unaffordable health care systems, industrialized agriculture, limited access to balance diet leading to low immunity and environmental destruction that facilitate new diseases, the disempowerment of vast numbers of people, and some persons in governments that no longer protect their citizens because they have been captured by moneyed interests. These problems have laid the groundwork for the current crisis, and must be addressed regardless.

At the same time, the immediate response to the coronavirus pandemic has also created conditions which are disproportionately dangerous or even impossible for many people living in poverty, displacement, and other forms of marginalization. Thus, in addition to addressing the long-term structural inequalities that have made our societies unsustainable, we must also protect the poorest and most marginalized among us from the immediate impacts of this health, social and economic crisis. By failing to protect the health and safety of at least one hundred million people living in abject poverty around the nation, many of whom do not have more than a few days' worth of food, we put the entire nation at risk in particular and the whole world in general.

We the undersigned call on governments, decision-makers, health researchers and practitioners, donors, civil society and communities to undertake the following urgently needed measures to protect all the vulnerable among us during this pandemic, and to find ways to implement the longer-term measures needed to put all societies on a more sustainable basis that will protect the health and well-being of humankind.

1. The poor, homeless, and workers must have access to hygienic protection as needed.
2. The poorest people must either be provisioned as needed if they are required to stay home and self-isolate, or they must be allowed to go out each day to gain money and food, with needed protections.
3. Marginalized people are most likely to suffer human rights abuses in the enforcement of community protection orders, and must be protected from these abuses.
4. People must be protected from losing access to food now and in the future due to disrupted production, supply chains or rising prices.
5. Poor people often have more predisposing conditions (disease, malnutrition or air pollution), and must be provided access to adequate health care.
6. Marginalized and poor people must be protected from losing their homes or income.
7. The health, populations, cultures, lands and autonomy of Indigenous peoples must be protected.
8. People susceptible to misinformation, identity-based attacks, fear and trauma must be protected.

9. Those experiencing domestic violence during “stay at home” orders must be protected, and provided with safe shelter if needed.

10. People in prisons, detention centers, IDP camps and refugee camps are at great risk and must be given adequate protection and health care, and released if appropriate.

11. Powerful actors must be prevented from using this crisis as an excuse to circumvent rule of law, dismantle protective laws and structures, grab resources, and commit other abuses.

12. Governments must find ways to access adequate resources to implement the recommended solutions to protect poor and marginalized people of all kinds.

13. Over the upcoming years, all societies must redistribute financial resources and adopt approaches that will put governance, economic systems, and societal structures on a more sustainable basis that will protect the health and well-being of humankind

Urgent Pandemic Response Measures to Protect the Most Vulnerable

We must take special measures immediately to protect people living in poverty or homelessness; people working in the informal sector; people without a social safety net or protections from abusive employers; people who are marginalized for reasons of gender, sexuality, disability, indigenous status, ethnicity or religion; those who are not considered to be citizens or are considered to have illegal status; those who are displaced, detained, or imprisoned; and others who are not accorded the same rights and access to resources and decision-making as the dominant population. Below we present suggestions under each category for your immediate consideration and actions.

1. The poorest people (some 100 millions) often have no access to hygienic protection (soap and water, other disinfectants).

- Provide free basic water and electricity services where there is an infrastructure to carry them
- Install water taps around cities where people can wash their hands easily, with provisions to prevent disease transmission through the tap heads
- Provide hygiene kits (soap, disinfectants, menstrual supplies) and masks (paper or cloth) to all who need them
- Provide daily public education via radio, visual posters and other accessible media on why and how to protect against the spread of the virus
- Urgent need for quick studies on the efficacy of washing with clean wood ashes to denature the virus (many people use ashes to wash when they do not have access to water)

2. The poorest people often cannot stay home and self-isolate – they must go out each day to find money and food.

- EITHER allow people to go out to work and find food, while making available all the protective measures described above

- OR enforce the stay-at-home rules, while delivering provisions to each family
- DO NOT enforce the stay-at-home order for people who will starve
- Use social mapping to identify those with urgent needs

3. Marginalized people are most likely to suffer human rights abuses in the enforcement of community protection orders.

- Stop issuing and enforcing impossible orders that will only lead to social tensions or deaths
- Stop discrimination and the use of violence in enforcement
- Provide everyone with the means to obey necessary restrictions
- Work with and through existing community structures to develop and enforce protection orders
- Stop spraying people with disinfectants, especially bleach: chlorine is toxic, and spraying it on people doesn't stop the virus from circulating.

4. Many poor people are losing access to food, threatening them with starvation, because of disrupted supply chains and subsequent price gouging; malnutrition limits immune response as well.

- Open up routes and borders to food and other essential supplies, even if they are closed to people
- Establish and enforce laws against price gouging or discrimination on any essential product
- Do not close food markets unless an alternate source of food is made available
- Distribute free food to all who need it, including to children who normally get their food at schools (which are now closed)

5. Poor people often have more predisposing conditions (such as disease, malnutrition or air pollution), but do not have access to adequate health care.

- Implement widespread coronavirus testing in poor communities, to identify those who need care
- Provide free health care to all
- Ensure that doctors do not engage in discriminatory rationing or denial of care for poor or marginalized people
- Continue to meet all other essential health care needs (generously defined) during the pandemic

6. Marginalized and poor people are most likely to lose their homes, jobs or other forms of income.

- Require jobs to be protected to the maximum extent possible (with paychecks to continue even if work ceases temporarily, perhaps subsidized by governments)
- Employers must not endanger workers' and their families' lives by demanding work in unsafe conditions; they must provide protective equipment, and pay for every worker to be tested for the virus; if positive, must test the family and ensure treatment
- Enforce a moratorium on housing evictions and repayment of personal debt

7. Indigenous peoples are at special risk, due to their high levels of poverty, precarious situations, low population numbers, remote locations, different cultures and languages, greater susceptibility to certain diseases, and being the targets of land and resource grabs.

- Ensure that these communities are not exposed to the virus by protecting them against all unwanted intrusions or visitors
- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate explanations of the nature of the disease and how to protect against it, designed and distributed by members of the communities themselves
- Ensure that no encroachment on their land and resources takes place at any time, including during the pandemic
- Provide needed resources for these communities to meet their needs for food, housing and health care, under their own direction

8. Poor people are most susceptible to misinformation, fear, panic and trauma.

- Require all social media to stop the viral spread of misinformation on the pandemic
- Circulate strong responses to misinformation, especially those that promote fear, panic, violence, or unsafe practices
- Establish fast, accessible ways for all people to question rumors and seek accurate answers
- Establish daily radio and other accessible broadcast shows for people to hear accurate discussions by doctors and scientists
- Address emotional distress and mental illness which can be aggravated by fear and isolation
- Urgent consideration is needed for how death is handled (presence of families, bodies, rituals and burials) so that families are not traumatized

9. Rates of domestic violence against women and against children are skyrocketing during “stay at home” orders.

- Establish and strongly enforce laws against any domestic violence, including during lockdowns
- Establish safe and healthy shelters for anyone experiencing domestic violence to escape to, and circulate information on how to reach these shelters safely

10. People in homeless encampments, shelters, prisons, detention centers, IDP camps and refugee camps are at great risk of rapidly spreading coronavirus, without adequate protection or health care.

- Provide safe shelter, food, and other necessities for the homeless
- Establish urgent policies to release all nonviolent offenders and those who are awaiting trials to serve their sentences or await trial at home
- Establish urgent policies to release everyone from migrant detention camps where they are being held involuntarily
- Provide the best health protections possible for those who are in displaced persons or refugee camps with no alternative place to live

- Establish an immediate cease-fire in any area of the country, as called for by the UN Secretary General, to alleviate the need for people to flee conflict

11. Some powerful actors are using this crisis as an excuse to circumvent rule of law and commit other abuses unrelated to coronavirus.

- Establish urgent policies and practices requiring on-line meetings of governmental bodies, broadcast to the public, so governments can function in an open and transparent way
- Establish severe penalties for any extra-legal alteration of unrelated laws, regulations, and practices during a crisis
- Civil society and journalists must pay special attention to this phenomenon and publicize it whenever it takes place

12. Governments say they do not have adequate resources to implement the recommended solutions to protect poor and marginalized people of all kinds.

- Levy an immediate surtax on very wealthy individuals and corporations to fund the coronavirus relief effort
- Provide immediate debt relief or debt forgiveness for indebted bodies or organizations, to free up resources
- The need for accountability and transparency should be emphasized; establish structures to monitor transparent expenditure of COVID-19 relief funds and prosecute corrupt practices

Longer-term Measures to Ensure Healthy and Sustainable Societies

13. We must undo the damage caused by the social and economic inequalities that have laid the groundwork for the current crisis and many others, including the disempowerment of vast numbers of people, violent conflict, widespread poverty, inadequate or unaffordable health care systems, industrialized agriculture and environmental destruction that facilitate new diseases, and some persons in governments that no longer protect their citizens because they have been captured by moneyed interests.

- Nationalize health care systems to ensure healthcare is available for all, to gain efficiencies and reduce costs, and in order to maximize coordination during crises
- Fully fund the health sector and ensure democratic oversight so it cannot be controlled by few individuals
- Remove all austerity/structural demands attached to Bank loans
- Investigate and implement the best alternatives to industrial agriculture, in order to end the documented role of food production systems in the appearance and spread of new diseases
- Investigate and implement the best practices to end ecological destruction in order to prevent the spread of new diseases – which can appear through jumping the species barrier, or spread through climate change
- Ensure democratic decision-making and equitable processes for people to choose who will represent them in the councils at the state, national and local levels, including by seating and paying committees of citizens in every state to establish budget priorities

- Eradicate poverty by providing basic income to everyone whose income is below a living standard
- Establish much more progressive tax rates to ensure meaningful redistribution through the full funding of all basic human services, including health care, education and training, basic housing, basic income, and “green” (carbon-free) public works projects for full employment
- Divert funding away from warfare and corporate subsidies, thus freeing up vast sums to address human need, alleviate suffering of all kinds, and fund the transition away from a carbon-based economy.

Our Prayers

We request that PTF should consider, invite and admit NNGOAC-19PR into its Task force team in order to ensure that this pandemic response strategic frame work is used as reference document by Government and others in enacting solidarity policies, practices and programs to cushion the adverse impacts and consequences of the pandemic and its aftermath.

That the Federal Government of Nigeria should consider the establishment and implementation of special 10 billion Naira Covid-19 Response Grants which are disbursed to non-profit organizations (on call for proposals basis) seeking funds to catalyze community/local action to cushion the adverse impacts and consequences of the pandemic and its aftermath. These grants will finance local projects that find innovative solutions to the diverse adverse social, economic, health and environmental challenges posed by Covid-19 in Nigeria to our people.

Kindly be assured of our utmost assurance, technical support and cooperation in working with you in solidarity to ensure we win this fight against this dreaded common enemy called coronavirus.

Yours in solidarity against Covid-19 pandemic



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Member, UN Harmony with Nature Program’s Knowledge Experts Representing Africa**



**Everest Nwamkwo Esq
National Secretary, National NGOs Alliance for Covid-19 Pandemic Response
Managing Director, Anpez Centre for Environment and Development**

Cc:

- The Senate President, National Assembly, Federal Republic of Nigeria
- The Deputy Senate President, National Assembly, Federal Republic of Nigeria
- The Speaker Federal House of Representatives, National Assembly, Federal Republic of Nigeria
- The Deputy Speaker, House of Reps. National Assembly, Federal Republic of Nigeria
- All State Governors, Federal Republic of Nigeria through Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF)
- The National Coordinator, Presidential Task Force on Covid-19
- The Chairman, Association of Local Government Councils of Nigeria (ALGON)
- To all print and electronic media houses
- National Human Rights Commission
- Governor, Central Bank of Nigeria
- To all MDAs
- To all Religious Bodies
- To all concerned citizens