

# COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE PENDULUM FOR RECONSTRUCTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Challenges and Prospects of COVID-19: Need for Rebuilding Higher Education in Nigeria

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#### **Abstract**

The chapter focused on challenges and positive prospects of COVID-19 and the need for rebuilding higher education in Nigeria. It adopted both the functional and analytical methods to explore the various political, economic and social difficulties which the pandemic had brought upon Nigeria. Further, the chapter recommended that in order to rebuild higher education in Nigeria, especially one which will be continuous, there is need to embrace online education which will help prepare students for digital jobs available in the labour market. It also recommended that in a bid to narrow the gaps created by COVID-19 in the polity, there is need for good leadership, digital economy, resuscitation of the public health system, integrating both classroom and online learning methods and contingency plan that will ensure an inclusive education for all.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Public Health, Pandemic, Patriotism, Good-Leadership

#### **Introduction**

The year 2020 was welcomed by the outbreak of a deadly pandemic named coronavirus (COVID-19), which started from Wuhan, a Chinese major business city in the Hubei province. Within a short period of time, the virus spread from China, which is located in the continent of Asia, to other continents of the world such as Europe, North and South America, Africa among others, leaving tragic legacies of reported cases of incessant increase in the number of infected people as well as those who are dead. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in serious emergency across the globe and this has not only succeeded in instigating fear and confusion between and among governments and the

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people, but also has ended up putting the entire world at a standstill. As the United States, Europe and Asia are tussling to fully comprehend the strange nature of the coronavirus, its effects, and possible solution, the continent of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is at the receiving end as this has added to the long list of challenges it has already been facing in the areas of lack of patriotism, armed conflict, terrorism, widespread hunger and poverty, ethnic tension and climate change. This situation has become so critical that Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world is gradually awakening to a new social, economic and political reality. Nigeria recorded her first case on February 28, 2020 and since then, the figure has kept running in thousands with hundreds of recorded deaths.

With many Nigerians (the unemployed, underemployed and aged), living in typically high density houses with little or no access to good food, drinking water, clothing and the like plus a little or no savings to aid the lock down, it is clear that the people are at a greater risk of not only contracting the coronavirus, but also spreading it like wildfire. The COVID-19 pandemic has raised questions bothering on how far Nigeria has gone as regards development most especially on the areas of patriotic and accountable leadership, science and technology, religion, and the like (Ewalt and Jennings,2014). Further, it has unmasked substantial abnormalities in the public health sector, the security sector and the education sector. On the area of education, Yinka and Adebayo (2020) reports that according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), an estimated 1.725 billion learners have been affected as a result of school closures, representing about 99.9% of the world's student population as of April, 2020. Though, the closing of schools, closing of state borders, restriction on movement and lockdown of people are wonderful measures taken to curb the spread of the coronavirus, but it must not be forgotten that they are no permanent solution as they would cause more devastating problems most of which is hunger. This chapter therefore seeks to explore the different challenges brought about by COVID- 19, prospects, as well as measures to be taken in a bid to rebuilding higher education in the polity.

### **The Challenges of COVID-19 in the Nigerian Polity**

Several challenges identify with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. These challenges, it should be noted, are not entirely new, but rather, have been made obvious by the pandemic. They are summarized in three categories namely: political, economic and social and would be analysed in the course of this study.

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### **Political Challenges**

It is worthy of note that the risk of Nigerian leaders using the COVID-19 pandemic as a means to accumulate wealth is quite appalling. In the course of the pandemic, banks, public and private establishments, private individuals, the World Health Organization as well as foreign private establishments and entrepreneurs have contributed immensely both in cash and donations of material relief packages, to the fight and containment of the coronavirus. In addition, Aisha (2020) reports that the Nigerian government approved a ten billion naira grant to be used in the fight against the pandemic. The presidency also released a five-billion-naira special intervention fund to the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), a national public health institute. Conversely, based on the already stated, the questions asked by many Nigerians remain: where have all these monies been donated and approved for the fight of COVID,-19 gone to since there are no much evidence of the use of Personal Protective Equipments by health workers, no sharing of face masks ,ill equipped isolation centers and how the government both Federal and State in handling the pandemic and also how well have the monies donated been used? It is based on this backdrop that Sahara reporters (2020) writes that the Northern Elders Forum accused some state governors of allegedly playing politics with the coronavirus outbreak in the country. It continues that some states were not being truthful with the numbers of reported cases in order to attract more funds from both the federal government and foreign donors. In addition to this, there are recorded events where states like Zamfara, Borno, Kogi, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Anambra among others rejected having the number of coronavirus cases as reported by the NCDC and there are instances where the NCDC apologized for inflating the figures. From the foregoing, one can easily depict the reason why a lot of Nigerians have refused to take the pandemic serious citing that it is a plot by politicians to embezzle the country's resources.

There is also the problem of communication failure between the government and the people. A lot of Nigerians complain of not being carried along properly in the course of the pandemic citing that the government is not sincere. This has made many people turn adamant to the course of the pandemic and it has never been without consequences. Just like the United States government in 1918, during the era of the Spanish flu, continuously reassured Americans that all was well and that the situation was well, the people were being misled as local officials and newspapers across the country were either deceptive or said nothing (Barry,2009). Even as 8,000 soldiers were hospitalized in camp Pike,

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Arkansas over four days, the Arkansas gazette in Little Rock, maintained, "Spanish influenza is plain la grippe - same old fever and chills"(Barry,2009). Consequent upon this, communication failure really caused the country more harm than expected. Klein (2018) notes that the Spanish influenza claimed 675,000 lives which maybe could have been saved if the government officials were sincere enough. In emergency situations like COVID-19 which the world is battling today including Nigeria, truthful communication is key to containing the pandemic. Authorities must learn to tell the people truth as this would get them enlightened and prepared against what they are about to face.

Still on the political challenges stems the problem of social inclusion of all Nigerians at times of crisis and that of ethnic divides in matters that concern the wellbeing of all; not few. Truth be told, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the high level of partial governance on the part of not only the government, but also the people. Tribalism, corruption and bureaucratic bottlenecks in the course of COVID-19 pandemic resulted in inadequate coverage and biased distribution of palliatives which are meant to cushion the effect of the lockdown imposed on people. Ayado (2020) when highlighting on how the Nigerian government has taken the responsibility of accommodating vulnerable and poor Nigerians by sending them palliatives reports that as announced by the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, 2.6 million vulnerable Nigerians are to benefit from the Federal Government cash transfer intervention programme. Also, over 11 million households have been identified in 35 states to benefit from the palliative measure. Further, the Minister noted that out of the 2.6 million Nigerians, FCT has 5,982 households, in Nasarawa, 8271; Katsina, 6732 and Anambra has 1,367 households respectively, the minister insisted that there was no favoritism in the palliative support and that the ministry capture the vulnerable persons by community engagement. However, many Nigerians are unhappy, stating that their tax monies are being used by politicians to mock them and that the process of distribution of whatever that may have been made available for the purpose have been politicised (Okon, 2020).

Many questions which beg for answers have been asked by Nigerians in reaction to the Minister's affirmation and these include:

1. Who really are the vulnerable Nigerians and what measure(s) qualify one in such category?

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2. If only 2.6 million Nigerians are to benefit from the federal government transfer intervention programme, what happens to the remaining millions of Nigerians who are being locked down in their homes with little or no means of survival?
3. Why does the government think that vulnerable Nigerians are more in the Northern part of the country than the Southern part, hence the inequity shown in the distribution and sharing of palliatives?

On the part of the people, the division and biased sharing of palliative packages is more imminent as in most cases, non-indigenes who reside in some states or were being caught up by the interstate movement restriction are being denied relief packages. However, in most cases, these non-indigenes solely participate and also contribute to community development, but when it gets to enjoying the proceeds of their contribution as members of the community, their identity is remembered. According to Okon (2020), more worrisome is the fact that the few people who have sighted semblance of the palliative packages in their area, decried the distribution process; they complained that a greater portion of the relief materials was reserved for party members who are strictly being identified through their party membership cards.

### **Economic Challenges**

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the global economy in two ways. One, the spread of the virus encouraged social distancing which led to the closure of markets, businesses, corporate offices and events. Two, the rate at which the virus is spreading, and the uncertainty of how bad the situation could get, led to flight to safety in consumption and investment among consumers and investors ( Ozili &Arun, 2020). Further, there was a general consensus among top economists of the world that COVID-19 pandemic would plunge the world into a global recession. In financial markets, global stock markets erased about US \$6 trillion in wealth just in a week from 24th to 28th of February 2020 (Ozili &Arun, 2020). Ozili (2020) notes that there are five main ways through which the COVID-19 pandemic spilled over into Nigeria.

1. The COVID-19 pandemic affected borrowers' capacity to service loans and this depressed banks' earnings and eventually impaired bank soundness and stability. Subsequently, banks were reluctant to lend money as borrowers struggled to repay the loans granted to them before the COVID-19 outbreak.

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2. There were oil demand shocks which was reflected in the sharp decline in oil price. The most visible of this was the drop in the price of crude oil from nearly US \$60 per barrel to as low as US \$30 per barrel in March 2020. In the course of the pandemic, people could not travel and this resulted in the fall of the need for aviation fuel and automobile fuel which affected Nigeria's net oil revenue as well as foreign reserve.
3. There were supply shocks in the global supply chain as many importers shut down their factories and closed their borders particularly China. Consequent upon this, Nigeria was seriously affected because she is a habitual import-dependent country hence, her shortage of crucial supplies like pharmaceutical supplies, spare parts and finished goods from China.
4. The national budget was also affected. Since, it was initially planned with an oil price of US \$57 per barrel, the fall in oil price to US \$30 per barrel meant that the budget became outdated and a new budget had to be formed and replaced with the low oil price.
5. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Nigerian stock market as many investors pulled out their investments. Stock market lost over NG# 2.3 trillion (US \$5.9 bn) barely three weeks after the first case of coronavirus was confirmed and announced in Nigeria on February 28, 2020.

Nigeria has gradually continued to fall into the debt trap of her Western and Asian counterparts. This can be seen through her incessant borrowing and receiving of foreign loans and grants and based on this, one would be bothered to know how they are going to repay these loans which come sometimes with very stringent conditionalities. The country's debt profile calls for serious concern not only to development experts and policy makers, but also all Nigerians as the most recent estimate put the debt service-to-revenue ratio to 60 percent, which is likely to deteriorate amid the steep decline in revenue associated with falling oil prices, (Ozili, 2020). These constraining factors could escalate the economic impact of COVID 19 outbreak and make it more difficult for the government to handle. Nigeria's unemployment rate has equally risen to an unbearable point. As reported by Onehi, (2020), over 60% of the total population of the country are youths with many of them vulnerable and out of gainful employment. Further, he stated that job opportunities for these youths are hardly available and with the COVID-19 outbreak, the

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unemployment rate is expected to increase exponentially thus, this is likely to escalate the already staggering unemployment data.

### **Social Challenges**

The coronavirus outbreak has also exposed the social challenges that have continued to bedevil the development of the country mainly in the areas of health and education. The pandemic has further unraveled the inadequacies that had been wrecking the country's public health sector. It is so alarming to say that a country like Nigeria, hardly records great numbers of people who come in from other countries for medication reasons, but rather, the reverse is the case. It is on record, that Nigeria is losing more than \$1 billion annually to medical tourism as many Nigerians travel abroad in search of good healthcare (Azuwike, 2016). Further, he reports that 40,000 Nigerians visit India every year in search of medical treatment and this clearly shows that lucrative opportunities in the healthcare sector are being lost to other countries through medical tourism. India is the world's third largest producer of pharmaceutical products by volume and the value of the country's export to Nigeria was \$307 million as of March 31, 2012 and this has continued to increase until present. From the foregoing, one would not be totally out of place to question the Nigerian government's reason (s) for neglecting the country's public health sector.

Added to the already existing social challenges is the issue of medical brain drain. Adepoju (2018) notes that each week, at least twelve Nigerian doctors are employed in the United Kingdom. More than 4000 are already practicing in the United States while Canada continues to attract medical profession also from Africa's most populous nation. With this, it is clear that the Nigeria's healthcare system is not only lacking in the area of infrastructure, but also personnel. Medical doctors are leaving Nigeria for want of a more convenient and conducive environment. Most of them are frustrated with the kind of treatment they get from both the Federal and State Government; this explains why they often embark on strike.

Nigeria's public health sector suffers poor infrastructure such as ineffective national insurance health system, poor emergency services, insufficient primary healthcare facilities, and these problems have often been linked to the high maternal and infant mortality rates in the country (Muhammad, Abdulkareem & Chowdhury,2017). Also, the Nigerian pharmaceutical industry has its own challenges. It is one of the largest industries in West Africa and accounts for about 60% of the market share in the region, but most of the Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) used in Nigeria are imported from China,

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and only 10 % of the drugs used in Nigeria are manufactured locally in the country. The industry suffers poor infrastructural and unreliable utility, scarcity of skilled workers, poor access to finance, poor demand due to robust competition from Asian companies particularly China, regulatory problem among others. Nigeria has a drug market that is almost unregulated because health agencies have difficulties in preventing the importation of illegal drugs and difficulty in tracking informal drug sellers that operate without a registered license (Fatokun, 2016).

Trapped education system is another challenge. The education sector in Nigeria is greatly affected as it had been shut down as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. The nationwide school closure has disrupted learning. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), almost forty million learners have been affected by the nationwide school closure in Nigeria. (Obiakor & Adeniran,2020). It would not be wrong to say that it is situations such as this that keep students out of school and idle and in turn; some of them could possibly venture into anti-social activities such as armed robbery, drug abuse, prostitution, among others. For an already severed education system, the COVID-19 pandemic poses more challenges that will amplify the cracks in the system. As the country grapples with these challenges, the question remains: can Nigeria's education system possibly adapt rapidly to the changing world?

Given the state of affairs in the world today, the country's ability to ensure continuity in learning will depend largely on her ability to take advantage of the available technology, provide adequate infrastructure, and mobilize stakeholders to prepare alternative learning programs (Obiakor & Adeniran,2020). There is dire need for students to take advantage of myriad of ICT learning opportunities but this to an extent has been trapped as a result of limited funding and the persistent deficiencies in planning by the government.

### **Positive Prospects of COVID-19 in Nigeria**

As the coronavirus spreads around the world; disrupting human interaction and movements, businesses and medical researchers, governments are rallying around looking for possible solutions. Trajectories of the epidemic have varied widely among countries as governments adopt a range of policies to contain it. On the other hand, in as much as COVID-19 pandemic has caused serious damages to countries of the world including Nigeria, it must have as well given out so many lessons to learn and therefore the question

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remains, are there any positive prospects of COVID-19? The answer to this question is yes and these include:

### **Good Leadership**

It is unfortunate that COVID-19 has caused Nigeria more harm than it had expected, but this comes with strong lessons to learn and one of them is the need for good leadership in the country. It is no secret that the Nigerian leadership system is very poor. There is lack of patriotism by both leaders and followers, inadequate communication and total disengagement between the leaders and followers for lack of trust. Most political institutions are built on the foundation of corruption and their motives are mainly for the interest of a few; not all. Hence, the insincerity of the government in carrying out certain development projects especially in the areas of health and education as well as their lack of cooperation with the people aided the spread of the pandemic. So, if the government would learn from this, there will be a post-COVID-19 Nigeria where cooperation and coordination among government agencies, development organizations and the people (without anyone feeling deprived) would be achieved. This could help strengthen unity and progress in the polity. There would also be a boost in communication and transparency because public behaviour and trust can have profound effects on epidemic response (Bathanti & Ladner, 2020).

### **Good public health infrastructure**

Nigerian government must have learnt her lessons from the COVID-19 experience as regards the state of the public health sector thus, they have to invest in the sector by providing good and quality public health infrastructures, building good hospitals, paying health workers very well, strengthening the disease surveillance system and investing in testing capacity. As a crucial element of national security, public health not only functions to provide adequate and timely medical care, but also to track, monitor and control disease outbreak. The Nigerian healthcare had suffered several infectious diseases year after year thus, the dire need to tackle the problem (Osain, 2011).

### **Diversification of Economy.**

Nigeria's reliance on an underdeveloped digital economy has to a large extent affected her economy. Most businesses including banks and technological companies, operates using the old-fashioned office work model as opposed to the "work from home" model (Sanusi,2010). The emergence of the coronavirus wrecked business environment in

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Nigeria. It impacted industries and markets. The operations of these industries and markets would have been minimally affected if they had a large digital operation infrastructure. The only services that are being offered through digital infrastructure in the course of the COVID-19 outbreak are the telecommunication services. If properly acknowledged and properly put to use, digital economy would play a major role in ensuring the economy is revived. E- Commerce applications (apps) that enable online buying and selling can allow buyers and sellers make purchases and sales at the comfort of their homes. It should be noted that with government revenues collapsing following the fall in oil prices, Nigeria urgently needs to diversify her economy. Since her independence in 1960, the Nigerian government has consistently relied on the export of crude oil as their primary source of revenue. Oil exports at present, account for one half of government revenue and generate about 87% of Nigeria's foreign exchange (Ozili, 2020). The collapse of oil prices by 60% since the start of the year to below \$30 a barrel has therefore decimated government revenues. So, in a bid to avert economic fallout, the government has to increase export revenues from agriculture and manufacturing to reduce the country's over dependence on oil. More attention should be given to the need for reinvigorating cocoa, leather, cement, groundnut, coal and the like for export. Nigeria has to take advantage of other mineral resources than oil (Aigbedion & Iyayi, 2007).

Finally, with the rate at which the country's educational system has been affected in the course of COVID-19 pandemic, one would not be totally wrong to predict a total revolution with the way and manner with which education is administered. As part of reforming higher education, the Nigerian education system have to gradually take advantage of technological innovations. Virtual communication method should be adopted not as a complete alternative to classroom teaching method, but rather as supplement. Government should include integrated digital learning platforms, video lessons and broadcasts through the radio and television. Though, these come with their own challenges like power failure, low accessibility of technological appliances, but it takes a committed and development-driven government to make it a reality.

### **Need for Rebuilding Higher Education in Nigeria**

Perhaps, COVID-19 is the crisis needed in order to identify the development gaps in the polity, and when these gaps are being identified, they are narrowed if not completely filled in order to enhance the country's development stride. One of these gaps that call for urgent attention is the education sector. Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, Nigeria's

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educational system has always had challenges in regard to infrastructure, personnel, talent based and market-driven curriculum development, and therefore, COVID-19 offers an opportunity to reshape and rebuild the education system. Also, Nigerian policy makers are as well opportune to explore how the emerging reality could bring about a reformed education system; one which would ensure a sophisticated style of learning.

From the present crisis, it is obvious that relying only on classroom method of teaching and learning would do the education system and students no good. This is why it is important to embrace the use of technology in and out of the classroom. Adaptive learning technology can ensure personalized learning with minimal teacher involvement and has the potential to deliver better learning experiences (Obiakor & Adeniran, 2020). Both teachers and students should be exposed to online education. This not only reduces computer illiteracy and the risk of an overcrowded classroom especially in public higher institutions, but also makes learning easy, accessible and convenient. With the introduction of various academic online applications, teachers and students can be able to gain easy access to knowledge and further enhance their research through the use of online books stored electronically on the internet. However, it is not all students that can comfortably access the technologies that can help them gain online education, even though students would as well face the challenges of power failure and low network coverage, there is still need to embrace the reality and gradually make it better. Further, in order to make this work, it is necessary to enhance public-private educational partnerships. Various stakeholders including the government, Internet service providers, phone providers and educational professionals need to collaborate to drive the required innovation. The government should also come in to help ensure that the cost of purchasing these technologies is low and affordable for everyone.

Learning based contingency planning is also very important as it would ensure learning continuity even in the midst of crisis to secure students and educators and to build resilience within the education sector. (Obiakor & Adeniran,2020). At such a time like this, the government should not only focus on keeping schools safe by counselling and providing information to the students about preventive measures and actions to take in order to curb the spread of coronavirus, but also identify ways to ensure that learning continues despite the challenges. The Federal and State government should partner with broadcasting service providers to help deliver educational contents during dedicated hours through telephone texts, E-mail, radio and television. More important to note is the fact

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that since the outbreak of the coronavirus, there has been an upsurge in the work life of people in society. So many people have lost their jobs unfortunately with little or no other means of survival while others are still fortunate to have theirs but with salary cut. Many of the workers who were laid off are the ones who mainly carry out manual duties except those in food and pharmaceutical industries. Conversely, workers who carry out most of their duties online were still retained by their employers. The lesson to learn from this is that the curriculum of schools should be designed to accommodate compulsory teaching and learning of digital skills since the world is gradually moving away from manual to digital works. Aside academic contents, the curriculum of schools should also be designed to carry students along on the area of personal development. This will help students take decisions on what they can really do with their talents. With this, students would be prepared in line with what is required of them in the labour market.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter expounded on the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian polity, the positive prospects as well as the need to take advantage of the pandemic and rebuild higher education. It showed that COVID-19 made more obvious certain structural problems which the country has been facing most especially that of bad leadership and this has really affected the political, economic and social progress of the country. The scope and severity of the pandemic is a clear signal that growth and development reforms are needed in Nigeria. The shutdown of the economy and the poor state of the country's public health system shows that both sectors beg to be reinvigorated. COVID-19 pandemic may not go off easily as believed by some people since there is no vaccine available yet. So, Nigerians should learn to live with it but strictly by adhering to the health protocols which state that one, there must be compulsory washing of hands in running water with foamy soap and also the use of hand sanitizer. Two, compulsory wearing of face mask; making sure it covers the nose and mouth properly and three, compulsory social distancing, among other preventive measures..

### **The Way Forward**

The following underlisted measures are to be considered and acted upon in order to have a better Nigeria.

1. There is need for good leadership in Nigeria. The government at all levels should be coordinated and united with sincerity and better communication strategies to work

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with. There is so much neglect on the areas of infrastructural development, unemployment, poverty, inequality and when this is unchecked, the people are left with no other option than to keep their patriotism aside and find alternative means of survival which definitely cause the polity great harm.

2. The Federal and State Government should diversify the economy. The over dependence on oil for export should be reduced and other resources such as agriculture reconsidered. This would aid the export of food products such as Cocoa, leather, cement among others. Also, the adoption of a digital economy (E-commerce) which can afford people the opportunity to buy and sell online, would play a great role in economic recovery.
3. The Federal and State Government should build a standard and resilient public health system and when this is done, there may not be need for Nigerians to travel abroad for health-related issues. Also, having first class public health system with properly trained and well-paid health workers would invite people from outside Nigeria into the country and this will boost the economy as well.
4. There should be an integration of both classroom and digital learning methods. The former should not be abandoned totally since getting used to the latter would be gradual. Students should be made to embrace online education as the future education and in a bid to ensure its success, there is need for public and private partnership with the government fully involved. Also, the government should help provide or at least reduce the cost of acquiring the needed technologies for digital education.
5. Peradventure the COVID-19 pandemic finally goes off and schools resume, the ministry of education is expected to come up with a contingency plan that would ensure an inclusive education for all students (both in rural and urban areas) as well as continuity in learning.

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