

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND EXIGENCIES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PROSPECTS FOR SMALL SCALE BUSINESSES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Renewable energy extols economic development in every level of governance in emerging societies. This study was designed to identify the role of renewable energy and the difficulties in implementing the role in Nigeria during the Covid-19. The study was in Enugu urban with a population of 100 small scale business operators. It was an exploratory research with questionnaire and interview used for data gathering. The study found that covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of activities in Nigeria and other places in the world. The pandemic propelled the increment in the cost/tariff of social services provided and subsidized by the government. Schools, economic and social events including sports and government offices where shut down. Some private companies including banks started down-sizing their workers due to the economic meltdown in the world. It finally exploded with the ENDSARS saga. Most of the businesses that closed down are yet to pick-up again due to the stringent economic laws. All these turned out to increase the number of hoodlums, robbers and unemployed in the society.

Keywords: Renewable energy, Covid-19 pandemic, prospect, and small scale businesses.

Background

Renewable energy “is an energy resource that is replaced naturally or controlled carefully and can therefore be used without the risk of finishing it all” (ScienceDaily, 2018). It would not be out of place to mention that solar power, wind and mini-hydro could be important players in Nigeria attaining energy independence in the long run, (Eboh, 2011). Renewable energies can provide sustainable energy services, using a mix of readily available, indigenous resources. It affords individuals, corporate organizations and government the opportunity to avoid issues relating to power outage, high electricity tariff which has led to the closure of smallest business outfits in the covid-19 era.

Covid-19, otherwise called Corona viruses was considered minor pathogens to humans until 2019 December when it became a global threat that requires global response. Corona virus (Covid-19) affected almost all the countries and territories around the world. According to Worldometer (2021), the rate at which the virus spread was high. Within a short time frame the record of cases was 89,742,458, recovered cases of about 64,251,727 and death cases of 1,928,542 around the world (Nwankwo, 2020). In Nigeria, schools, workplaces, social centers and every activity in the nation closed operation including worship places as ordered by the government. In addition, the Federal Government of Nigeria ordered a lockdown of movement and public gathering. This

order engineered hunger, rape, robbery, police and security personnel's extortion from the public. Palliatives were said to have been distributed to citizens in major areas but more than 70% of those who needed it were not given (Nwankwo, 2020). The cases that seemed to have upturned the work of small business units in Nigeria were the increase in the tariff of electricity consumption and the outrageous fuel pump price increase. Life became burdensome as most families found it difficult to make both ends meet. It was as bad that some people started stealing whatever thing they see as food. There were reported cases of neighbours stealing pots of soup or rice on fire (Nwankwo, 2020).

Meanwhile the government efforts to reduce the stress and hunger from the citizens were being mismanaged. Many of the business owners stopped operation due to their inability to pay the high electricity bill or fuel pump price. Palliatives such as rice, indomine, cooking oil and tubers of yam were procured by the government for distribution, but never get to final consumers. According to state correspondent, some of the materials found in the warehouses broken by the ENDSARS protesters included bag of fertilizers and seedlings kept for next year's farming. However, protesters announced that indomine, rice and other food items found in the warehouses said to be seedlings which have been preserved with chemical for 2021 farming season, were indeed food not seedlings or fertilizer. What a twist (Alaribe 2020).

It must be noted that power supply is the bedrock for meaningful and industrial sustainable development project of any nation. Today, power generation from the national grid is not enough to meet the needs of the teaming small and large industrial outfits in Nigeria. Due to high demand and low supply of electric power to many business outfits, constant power fluctuation, outages, frequent breakdown and vandalization of power installations characterized power generation in Nigeria (Iwundu, 2017). Due to these development, many industries resort to own power generation themselves. By-products of such private power generators range from noise generation to hazardous carbon emission to the environment which is harmful to human beings and plants. Again, many of the industries and small business operators have since stopped operation due to high cost of procurement maintenance of the machines, cost of fuelling and availability of component systems or parts.

This study was set to find out the role of renewable energy in the midst of unexpected exigencies of covid-19 among the local business operators in the society. The study concentrated in Enugu urban, Enugu State, Nigeria. The purpose for selecting Enugu urban was to assess the impact of Covid-19 in Enugu urban and the role of renewable energy in boosting small business outfits in the largest densely populated area in Enugu State. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) small scale industries and businesses were interviewed. Oral interview and questionnaire were adopted as a means for gathering data due to the characteristics of the respondents. The population sampled were sixty (60) females and forty (40) males. It was specified as follows:

Table one: Population of the study

Nos.	ITEMS	NUMBERS
1	Barbing Saloon	15
2	Bakery	15
3	Soap Making	15
4	Weaving	15
5	Wielding	15
6	Vehicle Panel Beating	15
7	Hair Dresser	15
8	Auto-Electrician	15
9	Poultry farmers	15
10	Drinking Houses	15
	Total	150

Source: Field Survey 2020.

The interview was conducted by the researcher themselves. There was no need for research assistant due to the small number of respondents and area of coverage. The data collected was calculated using percentage and results presented in percentage and content analysis.

The theory of **dialectical materialism** as propounded by [Moses Hess](#) and developed by [Karl Marx](#) and [Friedrich Engels](#) (Charbonnat, 2007) was adopted as a synthesis to this study. The reason for using **dialectical materialism was on its indication as narrated by Moses Hess** that every **economic order** grows to a state of maximum efficiency, while simultaneously developing internal contradictions and weaknesses that contribute to its systemic decay. The theory was appropriate for the study as can be displayed by the events on the hick in electricity tariff and the cost of renewable energy. The resultant effect being that there were protest and destruction of properties.

Interview questions

Seven questions were posed to the respondents interviewed. The questions are stated below:

1. What is your gender?
2. How long have you been in this business?
3. Are you aware of renewable energy products?
4. Do you use any renewable energy products in your business or to powering your machines?
5. Do you see renewable energy products as a panacea for any business and social obstruction such as Covid-19?
6. What do think are the challenges for renewable energy meeting their role in future?
7. What do you recommend as solutions for renewable energy sustaining the small scale businesses in your area?

Findings**Table two: Summary of the findings from the field survey.**

No.	Question	Response
1	Gender?	1. Male 40% 2. Female 60%
2	How long are you in this business?	1. 1–5 years (26%) 2. 6–10 years (52%) 3. 11 – above years (22%)
3	Are you aware of renewable energy products?	1. Yes 58% 2. No 42%
4	Do you use any renewable energy products in your business or to powering your machines?	1, Yes 15% 2. No 85%
5	Do you see renewable energy products as a panacea for any business and social obstruction such as Covid-19?	1. Very sure 46% 2. sure 29% 3. Somehow 15% 4. Not at all 10%
6	What do think are the Challenges for renewable energy meeting their role in future?	Costs Transmission Barrier to entry Politics oversupply
7	What do you recommend as the best solution for sustaining the small scale businesses in your area?	1. Aware of the advantages of renewable energy product, government should invest on it in order to encourage rural development. 2. Renewable energy stands to be the best option due to its separability, that is, it is not required to get connected to national grid. 3. Government should invest in renewable energy as well as aid the small business units owners to reduce the cost of procurement.

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Awareness creation should be carried out to sensitize the general public on the advantages of renewable energy. 5. Investigation should be carried out to find out which of the business groups are sabotaging the renewable production in Nigeria and deal with it appropriately. 6. Partnership with large industrial companies and nations on the production of renewable energy materials at an affordable price. 7. Enabling environment such as tax free, loan granting, subsidies and grants should be provided by the government to ensure power is provided. 8. It was sad that electricity tariff went so high that many citizens are no longer able to pay their monthly bills. The tariff should be scaled down to enable the small business units to stand again. 9. The Covid-19 sterilized all businesses particularly those automated with energy. The use of renewable energy could profit more during covid-19 than normal electricity power supply if the cost is reduced. 10. For economic recovery after the COVID-19 recession, governments must curb ways to build hope on the business people to stand again. 11. Renewable energy investments yield a high return and create jobs. 12. The power sector and COVID-19 should plan for a sustainable recovery to aid the business owners to a new level (e.g., flexible power solutions, such as demand responsiveness or energy storage).
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Source: field survey 2021.

Discussions

From the above table, gender was significant and played role in the study. Among the 100 people interviewed, 60% were female while the remaining 40% were male. It means that if these numbers of young people go out of job due to the exigencies of covid-19, it may lead to other social events such as prostitution or armed robbery. According to Oraegbunam (2005:83) “...sex and sexuality have so much been abused and deprecated to a level of commodity even to be exported overseas in the manner of female trafficking”. Idleness could lead a youth to venture into such immoral action, especially those who have been taking care of themselves and also supporting their families (Idamola 2018). Today, it has been proved that frustration and lack of means of livelihood are prominent to the causes of yahoo robbery and suicide among people of about 20 to 35 years, especially university students.

From the findings of the study in table two above, greater percentage (58%) of the population were aware of renewable energy, while the remaining population (42%) are not aware. However, among those who are aware of the renewable energy, 85% of them do not use renewable product at all. The study found that the reasons why renewable energy products are not being used were because: Acquiring a renewable energy product is expensive; Most of the elements die frequently; Maintenance cost is high. These were in line with dialectical materialism as a theory which tries to submerge growth by inputting heavy restring on the subjects. On the issue of whether renewable energy products could be a panacea to Covid-19 exigencies? Those who said 'very sure' were 46%, sure 29%, somehow 15% and not at all 10%. It was not difficult quantifying the best way to handle the precarious situation in energy sector. The renewable material such as solar energy, wind energy, hydropower, geothermal power, and biomass are expensive, and may not be within the reach of low income earners. Neither could the small scale business owners be able to pay the high electricity tariff.

The challenges of renewable energy meeting their role in future were noted to be costs, transmission, barrier to entry, politics and oversupply. The bottom line in the precarious situation was for the government to look inward and find solutions to the exigencies of covid-19. Aware of the advantages of renewable energy product, government should invest on it in order to encourage small business operators in order to enhance rural development as well as ease the crisis of Covid-19. Renewable energy stands to be the best option due to its separability, that is, it is not required to get connected to national grid. Government should invest in renewable energy to reduce the cost of procurement. Awareness creation should be carried out to sensitize the general public on the advantages of renewable energy. Investigation should be carried out to find out which of the business group are sabotaging the renewable production in Nigeria and make effort to address covid-19 exigencies.

There should be a partnership with large industrial companies and nations on the production of renewable energy materials at an affordable price. Enabling environment

such as tax free, loan granting, subsidies and grant should be provided by the government to ensure power is provided. It was sad that electricity tariff went so high that many small business owners could no longer be able to pay their monthly bills.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 sterilized all businesses particularly those automated with energy. The use of renewable energy could profit more during covid-19 than normal electricity power supply. For economic recovery after the Covid-19 recession, governments must curb ways to build hope on the business people to stand again. Renewable energy investments yield a high return and create jobs. Investment on it is a right step in a right direction. The power sector and COVID-19 should Plan for a sustainable recovery of the saga to a new level.

Here also, the theory of dialectical materialism surfaces as the prime conductor to the inability to make a choice. If choice becomes difficult to make, systematic failure will arise as could be notice from dialectical materialism. The decay would contradict government efforts for development in Nigeria.

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