

## CHAPTER-12

# COVID-19 LOCKDOWN SAGA: THE NEW NORMAL FOR LIBRARIANS



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Just like a dream, I remember waking up on the 28th of February, 2020 to listen to the news of the first index case of COVID-19 case in Nigeria. I couldn't believe what I heard, I had to call my husband out of “the other room” to come and listen to the news. My first instinct was to restrict movement in and out of our house immediately till we ascertained the details of the index case and possibly until when they conclude the contact tracing. We quickly implemented all the safety protocols: no one enters my house without using hand sanitizer and face mask. We also restricted our visitation to places like markets, schools, and gatherings. Before we knew it, hand sanitizer became scarce, face mask disappeared from the market, soap started becoming expensive and food items became super expensive. In order to reduce the spread of Covid-19, I quickly went to the Pharmaceutical stores around our house to buy alcohol-based spirits, glycerin isopropyl and other ingredients for making produce hand sanitizer and also bought packets of

handkerchiefs to produce hand sewn face mask for my family and friends. By the second week of March, as the number of Covid-19 cases continued to rise, the federal government of Nigeria through his Task Force Committee on Covid-19 announced a total lock down to restrict interstate movements in addition to the ban on international travelling, that marked the beginning of Covid-19 Saga that has imposed a substantial burden on people which leads to a significant disturbance in peoples lifestyle globally.

### **Next Level: The New Normal**

Before I continue discussing my Covid-19 experience, I want you to know that the novel corona virus pandemic has been recognized as a threat to social and economic development of our nations (Samira and Mordjan, 2020). The importance of this piece is connected with librarians' need to fight for survival has the world economic is in a state of coma, getting necessary support for the library may seem difficult for now. No doubt, the current changes are inevitable, it has come and life may not return to

normal until after sometime. Even if it is over, are we sure that another pandemic will not strike? This is a question that no human can answer except the Almighty. The most important thing is how libraries will manage the effects of the corona virus pandemic. As a Librarian and a student who has a first PhD seminar presentation just few days away from the day the pandemic struck, my taught was that it would end within 1-2 weeks but unfortunately, I spent more than 3 months at home without proper exercise which led to a slight weight gain for me, boredom, excessive sleeping and over eating during the first phase of the total lockdown in Nigeria was a bitter experience I have ever had.

In a similar view, Samira and Mordjan, (2020) reported that the impact of the lockdowns on peoples' health forced many researchers to have sleepless nights by trying to unveil the factors responsible for obesity among humans. Several scholars like Rundle et al., 2020; Zachary et al., 2020; Pearl, 2020; Bhutani and Cooper, 2020 reported that covid-19 pandemic

lockdowns may be one of the factors that contributes to people's weight gain due to unfavorable changes in lifestyle routines such as stress-related eating, fewer opportunities for physical activity, sedentary behaviors, and increased eating due to more screen time. Presently, lockdown in some countries are currently lifted, people's lives have not returned to normal, although some companies have announced that vulnerable employees can work remotely, meaning to work "from home", some schools will not reopen unless they follow the federal government's laid down protocols as the only condition for reopening of the education sectors in the country. Knowing fully that many federal universities may not be able to meet up with the requirements for reopening as it is obvious that the federal government may not be able to take full responsibility of the required items.

### **The New Normal**

Since the closure of my institution for physical interaction in March 2020, I adopted the "New normal", which is a new way of life, a kind of transition

from the old normal to pandemic induced ways of life. Although the term new normal has been used by economist in relation to the aftermath of the global recession of 2007-2008, but in the context of this write up it means a new life, new ways of operation after the pandemic. Employees now have to work remotely since the pronouncement of the total lockdowns that led to a total compliance with the governments' Work from Home (WFH) policy.

Within my limited sphere of influence, I was busy sensitizing and educating people about sticking to the required Covid-19 protocols through social media, mobile conversation, emails, and WebEx and zoom meetings. A total overhauling of the library operations and services that requires strict adherence to the governments' policy on Covid-19 now becomes our new normal that librarians must adopt by providing adequate hand sanitizers, face masks, social distancing, virtual libraries and teleconferencing facilities for virtual training and meetings.

To manage the new normal, librarians must think about how to leverage the volatile world by looking at the new ways of service delivery. The new normal will be different to different people, the future is full of uncertainties, some librarians may want things to be settled before they decide, that I feel it's dangerous for the new library life, librarians should strike the iron when it's hot by readdressing the current situation for effective decision making and availing themselves of the online webinar trainings and conferences that are currently being organized by different institutions and bodies across the globe in order to acquire new skills on digital editing, web design, automated indexing and abstracting, digital humanities, virtual engagements, online marketing and promotion, online advocacy, embedded service provision, reskilling tools, health, safety, disaster management, emerging librarianship/ new librarianship, emergency health management, emergency communication skills/ information literacy and selective dissemination of information. Failure to embrace the

emerging changes may lead to – loss of jobs, loss of budget, loss of human contact and loss of values within the society. It has now become imperative for Libraries to move their contents online, compile list of open access source, retraining of library personnel and development of new policy for emerging services.

### **Libraries Go Virtual**

It is no longer a business as usual, as reverse is now the case in the ways and manners library charges out the book materials to users, it has been observed and reported that from March, 2020 the libraries that have their materials online started checking out eBooks virtually, more digital items were borrowed online than during the same period last year. The main reason for the increase is obvious, people were directed by the Nigerian government to work from home, schools and tertiary institutions were asked to close for activities until further notice, so people could not go to the library, they had to access information resources remotely. With more time spent at home, people who may not have previously tried e-resources



particularly e-journals, or eBooks or audios were looking for ways to continue to read, which I found very interesting and as a great opportunity ever due to the fact that many publishers, vendors and database providers started releasing their contents eBooks to their subscribers and the general public to support the governments and most importantly to cushion the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Libraries' service delivery; Librarians keep organizing webinar trainings for the professionals to manage the challenges brought by the pandemic, institutions went virtual for their meetings and functions, users access online resources from their libraries and lots of online interactions dominated the second phase of the lockdown. All these factors have created an explosion in online engagements particularly teaching, learning, reading and listening. As we move towards a new academic year, this trend will most likely continue. With this free access to peer reviewed eBooks, journals and lectures, one was able to update thesis

work, write and contribute chapters to books and journals published locally and internationally.

### **Measures for Containing COVID-19**

I am alarmed because since the resumption of activities in some sectors, many Nigerians have reverted back to their old normal, people feel it's over; they don't seem to understand the gravity of what we are facing. People do not realize how easy it is to have community spreading, saliva sometimes can travel unnoticed, you see people converging or exercising, transacting in groups. Considering the devastating effects of Covid-19 on people ranging from hunger/ abrupt poverty, socio and economic distortion, emotional/ psychological turbulence, uncertain/ nutritional abnormality, environmental/ atmosphere contamination, social distancing/ self-isolation to mention but a few. These are some of the reasons why librarians must engage in sensitizing their community, to educate public on the danger of returning to the old normal quickly and let them know that the only tool we have is preventive measures. Today community

transmission is alarming, Nigerian government is not testing enough to determine those who are covid-19 positive, it means that people are actively passing the disease across. When do we need to halt the spread? The time is NOW!

There is no doubt, containing the spread of Covid-19 has no better way than the practice of social distancing and following the World Health Organization's Safety measure such as regular hand washing with soap and water, use of alcohol based hand sanitizer, use of face mask/ face shield, work at home, practicing of social distancing, regular decontamination of public places, sneezing on curve elbow and eating of immune boosting meals will help in keeping safe.

### **Library Services in the era of COVID-19**

In line with the assertion of Garba (2020), it is difficult to fight an invisible enemy which may even be more difficult to win if one is unable to determine its capacity. What we heard is what we believe, we obeyed government directives, we remained calm, we

have to let go so many things for us to stay safe and safe others. Physical interactions, meetings, lectures, offices, library spaces and resources have moved online and now replaced by zoom, WebEx, social media, virtual/ digital libraries and websites. Libraries in developed countries have stepped in to provide online services to their users to keep them busy during the novel pandemic period, the story is a little bit different in Nigeria due to the fact that many libraries have not fully automate their libraries, so we do not even have a website of their own, now the change has unveiled the emerging services that will now force librarians to up skill their knowledge to render emergency library services.

Emerging librarianship means identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the libraries, then adjust to the current changes in order to remain relevant in the society. It also means sensitizing and advocating for the well-being of library communities beyond the old normal. Provision of health information to library users should not be seen as the role of medical librarians but

be regarded as a collective responsibility of the entire library to collaborate with the health department within the community to educate and sensitize people on the need to maintain personal hygiene. In line with the Maslow's hierarchy of needs, people cannot learn if they are hungry, scared, or sick. So to ignore the basic needs that will keep people healthy, will make library's mission on learning to be hollow.

Librarians are citizens, to say we are about literacy and not partner with teachers and doctors means our dedication is to what we do, not what needs to do from the perspective of the community. To say we are about learning and only be source of eBooks in a pandemic era is inappropriate. Yes, our fellow citizens need e-resources, but they need compassion, connection, and community dedicated to their full well-being.

### **Conclusion**

It's worth knowing that a new normal has come, will this new normal be founded on what we lost, or what we seek to gain? From the lessons learnt

from the novel covid-19 pandemic, it's obvious that people have over reliance on China for almost everything, but now people will have to start manufacturing what they need, produces what they will eat and develop contents for their community to use. Librarians must advocate for a new normal with our collections, our buildings, but mostly, with our expertise. Librarians by title, by education, or by spirit must bring about a new normal that pushes the society towards sustainable development. It must minister to those seeking meaning.

It must support better decision making in the wake of this pandemic and in preparation for the next crisis. Librarians must be proactive, creative, innovative and reskilled. We must also take leadership roles, lobby, advocate, delegate, upscale, retrain staff, network and prioritize library activities, manage time, be organized, tolerance, collage and turn to people's library by taking the library resources and services to users doorstep regardless of the distance, most

importantly libraries need partnership to survive the storm.

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