

The Impact of The Covid-19 Pandemic on Educational and Economic Well-Being of The Residents of Bomet County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), a highly infectious respiratory disease with no known cure, has ravaged the world economy, human lives and social activities on an unprecedented scale. Developed and developing nations are grappling with the measures to control the spread and mitigate the adverse impact of the virus. Kenya as one of the developing countries has been affected by the virus and has taken a raft of measures to contain the spread. These measures have had a ripple effect on normal lives of Kenyan citizens. The survey aimed at assessing the impact of the coronavirus disease on education and economic sectors with a view to providing sustainable interventions. The primary data was collected using a questionnaire that was administered to a sample population of 18,326 residents of Bomet County. The data collected, was checked for consistencies, outliers and missing values and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis was facilitated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The distribution of respondents among the sub-counties ranged from 18.58 to 20.57%, male were more (52.86%) than females (47.14%), the youthful (20 – 49 years) were more (72.6%) than the aged (> 50 years) at 21.27% and majority were married (67%). Only 18.56% of the populations were in formal employment and therefore most residents could potentially be economically affected by COVID-19. The education sector was the most severely affected (76.9%). Most of the residents were aware of COVID-19 with radio being the most popular source of information (71.7%). In general, there was a negative impact on educational and economic well-being of the residents of Bomet county. The residents' educational and economic needs were severely affected by the pandemic and there was need for support from the government by way of reduced taxation among other measures. The findings informed policy formulation and direction on sustainable interventions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic by the County Government of Bomet and other devolved units in Kenya.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic, education, economic wellbeing, Interventions, Bomet County

INTRODUCTION

On 31st December 2019, a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown etiology was reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. On 9th January 2020, China Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported a novel corona virus as the causative agent of this outbreak, Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). COVID-19, an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) Coronavirus 2 (WHO, 2020). The corona virus ravaged the world economy, human lives and social activities on an unprecedented scale.

The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths soared globally. The Western countries were the epicenter of the pandemic. Africa, given its huge population of approximately 1,361,596,563 as of Sunday, February 28, 2021, based on the United Nations estimates and lack of efficient and effective Health services was on course to become the next epicenter. Governments in Africa imposed public health containment measures that would seem extreme under any other circumstances. Despite containment policies and measures in Africa, the virus still spread (Baldwin & di Mauro, 2020).

Using the Public Health law, Public Health (Control of Disease) Act (2012), the Kenyan Government imposed various forms of restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, using the Public Health (prevention, control and suppression of COVID-19) rules (PHA, 2020), the Kenyan Government put up

measures, including stopping international travels in and out of the country to contain the spread of the virus. However, with reported cases of local transmissions, the Government imposed social distancing policies, work and school suspensions, curfew restrictions countrywide and cessation of population movements from the capital city and other regions, in which COVID-19 cases were noted to be rampant. These measures were due to the highly contagious nature of the virus, and the inexorable implications of its explosive spread during the “acceleration phase” of the pandemic. This inevitably led to economic hardship, which compelled the National Government to propose increasingly bold anti-recession measures such as reduction on Value Added Tax (VAT) and Pay as You Earn (PAYE).

Bomet County which is located in the South Rift region of Kenya with a land size 1630 Km² and a population size of 875,689 as at 2019 Census Report was equally affected by the disease. The County is primarily agricultural and dominated by Livestock and horticultural farming, due to its favorable climatic conditions and deep fertile soils. Bomet County has three main markets: Mulot, Chebunyo and Kapkwen, whose catchment areas extend into the neighboring counties and beyond. The onset of the pandemic that led to cessation of movement into and out of Nairobi County affected the transit of goods along the Nairobi-Narok- Kisii highway, along which Bomet County lies. Furthermore, Bomet County Government had put up more measures to curb the spread of the virus which included the closure of the open-air markets. With the formation of County emergency and response teams, isolation centers were set up, cross border screening initiated as was sensitization of the residents. Moreover, the County Government of Bomet committed to undertake research, as a measure to inform strategies and policies during and post COVID-19 pandemic period.

Statement of the Problem

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak caused panic across the Globe because very little was known about the disease. Its rapid spread and high mortality pushed the World Health Organization to categorize the COVID-19 as a global pandemic. Following its outbreak, the potential detrimental repercussions became apparent. Countries across the world faced complex and interconnected threats to their social, economic, political and health wellbeing. In response, countries took drastic control measures such as border closures, suspension of international travels, mandatory quarantine and trade restrictions to prevent entry of the virus into their territories. In addition to these measures, the government of Kenya pronounced containment measures such as social distancing- in public transport, public gatherings, offices, places of worship, and closure of institutions of learning and markets -, wearing of face masks, hand washing and sanitizing. With regards to the measures enforced by the government, it was clear that the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the fragility of the Kenyan Economy as learning institutions, business enterprises, social amenities, ports and open-air markets were suddenly shut down. Cessation of movement, ban on large gathering, mandatory wearing of masks, ban on handshake and social distancing greatly affected the socio-cultural well-being of society. The pandemic also revealed significant gaps in the preparedness by national and county governments to protect the vulnerable communities, small and medium enterprises, performing artists, casual laborers, among others. Bomet County, like other counties, was affected by the pandemic and the containment measures that were imposed. However, it is not clear to what extent these containment measures have affected the educational and economic well-being of the residents of Bomet County. Most of the studies on COVID-19 have been carried out in the Western world. The developing countries and Kenya in particular have lagged behind in researching on COVID-19. This study will therefore fill this gap by contributing to the discourse on COVID-19 impact in the developing world. This study therefore sought to investigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on educational and economic well-being of the residents of Bomet County.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on educational and economic well-being of the residents of Bomet County.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study was to investigate impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Educational and Economic wellbeing of the Residents of Bomet County.

The Specific Objectives were to:

Establish the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education in Bomet County.

Establish the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic activities of residents of Bomet County.

Limitations of the Study

While the study showed interesting results on the impact of the pandemic on educational and economic well-being of the residents of Bomet County, it had some limitations.

The purpose of the study was to capture responses resulting from the pandemic, a questionnaire, key informants' interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data. The use of self-reported data could create a certain bias, so future studies should consider using observations and document analysis to triangulate data. Given the subjective nature of perceptions of well-being, there is an opportunity to extend the research and give a deeper understanding of the residents' experience by taking a qualitative study approach.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed method research design. It integrated both qualitative and quantitative data that seek the participants' attitude and behaviours, based on tangible evidence on how COVID-19 had socially and economically affected their lives. A sample size of 18,326 was selected purposively in order to reach out to as many residents as possible in the Bomet County.

Data collection was conducted by use of three methods: First, was the use of a questionnaire which was administered to a total of 18,326 respondents across the County. The target population for questionnaires comprised of residents of Bomet who had resided there for more than one year. The research assistants (RAs) were required to visit households, business premises, market centers, administrative centers and health facilities to administer the questionnaires and to collect information sought. Secondly, key informant interviews were conducted for the purposes of acquiring qualitative data. Lastly, Focus Group Discussions were held. The data was collected over a period of six weeks from 31st August 2020 to 12th October 2020. There were 50 research assistants in each ward.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Data of the Respondents

Out of the 18,420 people sampled for the survey, 18,326 interviews were completed. Spatially, respondents were evenly distributed among the sub counties. The percentage representation was 20.38%, 20.10%, 20.57%, 20.38% and 18.58% in Konoin, Bomet East, Bomet Central, Sotik and Chepalungu, respectively. In terms of gender, the male gender (52.86 %) responded more than the female gender (47.14%). Age wise, the youth (20-49) constituted the highest percentage at 76%. Respondents above 50 years were fewer at 21.27%. This is not surprising given that the youth constitute the majority of the population according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2020 census.

A majority of the respondents (70.05%) in the county had secondary level of education. In terms of marital status, 62.16% of the respondents were married, 27.36% were single while the widowed, separated and divorced jointly accounted for 10.47%. On employment, 33.95% of the respondents were unemployed followed by 33.23% of respondents who were self-employed. Employed respondents were 18.51%, while 4.58% and 9.73% indicated they were retired and casual laborers, respectively. Furthermore, 25.41% of the respondents indicated that their employment status was negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, while 74.59% indicated that the pandemic had not affected their employment status.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Education

To establish the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education, the study interrogated awareness by residents of Bomet County on alternative learning approaches that were adopted by the Government during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Regarding awareness of alternative learning approaches that were adopted by the Government, the results are presented in Figure 1.

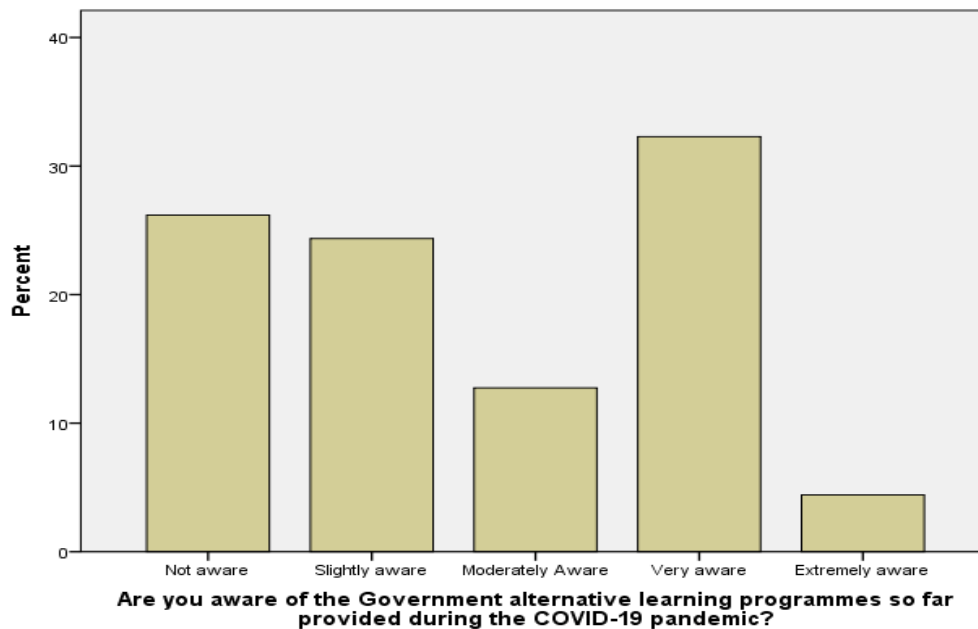


Fig. 1: Awareness on alternative learning approaches adopted by the Government during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Figure 1 shows that 73% of respondents registered some form of awareness on the Government's alternative learning approaches. However, 27% of respondents indicated that they were not aware of alternative learning approaches availed by the Government. To keep the learners engaged, and mitigate loss of essential learning time, the Government of Kenya - through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) - had stepped up measures to facilitate learning through different platforms such as the Kenya Education Cloud, TV, radio, Ed-tech apps, and use of mobile phones.

It is evident from the results that both the National Government, County Government of Bomet and other Stakeholders, that information on the availability of alternative learning approaches did not reach the general population. Slightly over a quarter of the respondents were not aware of alternative learning approaches. Raising awareness in the community on the alternative learning approaches would be a strategy for ensuring that learners could acquire skills and knowledge through a variety of approaches to meet their educational needs. This calls for adaptation of the alternative approaches for acquisition of knowledge. From this study, it is clear that educational needs can be met even during school closure, and that the low income population can implement alternative learning approaches (Rodriguez, Rebeca, Cristobal, Alberto, Ciarrusta & Alejandro, 2021).

The impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Economic Activities

To be able to measure the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the economic activities in Bomet County. Overall, 45.9% of the respondents felt that the pandemic had a severe effect on the economy, 26.6% felt that the effect was moderate, 12% respondents that the effect was mild, 7.6% had a feeling that the effect was very mild while only 7.9% felt that the pandemic had no effect on the economy.

Figure 2 shows the effect of the pandemic on the agricultural supply chain. 35.14% of the total respondents interviewed had the view that the effect of the pandemic was moderate, while 27.10%, 35.14% 18.15%, 10.85% and 9.03% felt that the effect was severe, mild, very mild and not at all affected, respectively.

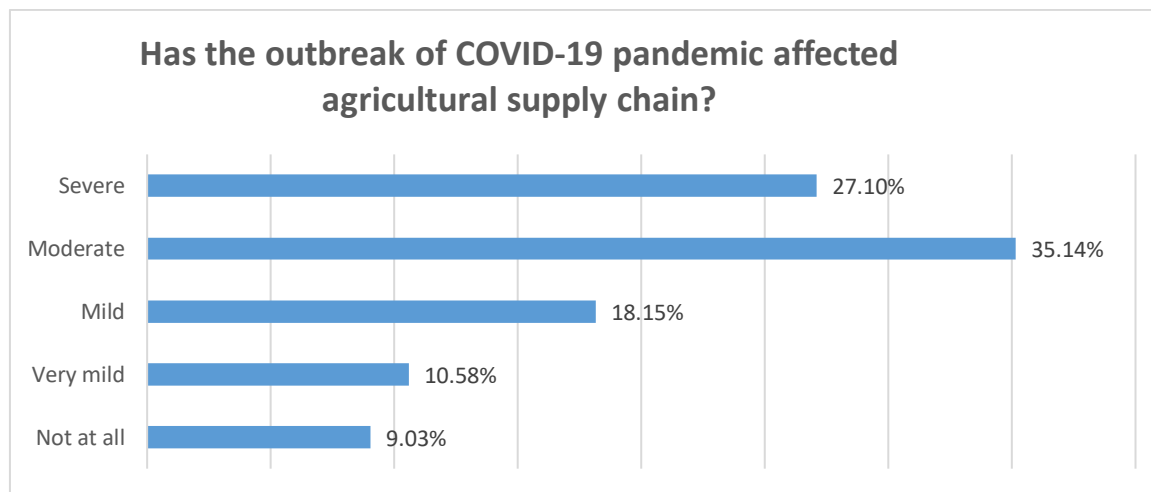


Fig. 2: The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Agricultural Supply Chain

The analysis of the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the agricultural supply chain in the County was crucial because, from the analysis of the socio-demographic data on employment status of the residents, self-employment was identified as a major source of income in the county with 33.23%. Analysis of the three main sectors categorized as self-employed i.e. transport/logistics operations, SMEs and Agribusiness showed that Agribusiness was the most populous of the three with 46.41% of the total responses.

Since business is a major economic activity for Bomet County and, along with agriculture, are the backbone of the County's economy (County Government of Bomet, 2018), the findings were important. The collapse of businesses can adversely affect revenue and essential service delivery in the county. The collapse would also lead to rise in unemployment rates because Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are major employers in the county.

According to Bartik, Bertrand, Cullen, Glaeser and Luca (2020), the dramatic spread of COVID-19 disrupted business operations worldwide. This was further heightened by restrictions put in place by countries to control the spread of the virus. These restrictions and other measures employed to contain the spread of the virus, were and still are not business friendly.

CONCLUSION

The study suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the education and economic well-being of the population. The study concluded that COVID-19 Pandemic adversely affected education in Bomet County. Radio (43%) and guardian-aided learning (37%) were the most preferred alternative learning approaches. Digital approaches were not preferred largely due to unavailability of the digital devices and internet connectivity, thus the measures were largely unsuccessful.

Overall, the study showed that the pandemic had a severe and moderate effect on the economy. Those who were self employed were negatively affected by the pandemic. The effect of the pandemic on the agricultural supply chain was not very severe. However, many businesses collapsed during the pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made the following recommendations especially towards post COVID-19 era:

Affordability and accessibility to alternative education approaches were identified as a challenge, and intervention policies should be put in place.

The national government should invest in the country's education system with a view to coming up with creative, innovative and interactive learning tools through research and development.

Business mentorship and training programmes targeting the unemployed and under-employed to enable them acquire skills for self-employment and Business Management.

A revolving start-up fund at no or low interest rates. The fund should target those at the bottom of the economic pyramid, especially the unemployed and under-employed youths, with a view to incubating and establishing them in sustainable businesses. This will spur the economy growth and approve the purchasing power of the population.

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