



## **POLICY MEASURES FOR MITIGATING COVID-19 INDUCED JOB LOSSES IN NIGERIA: A REVIEW**

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### **Abstract**

Swift response and well aligned interventions are generally regarded as imperatives for mitigating the effects of crises on the vulnerable. Sequel to the foregoing, this paper examines Nigeria's policy measures used to alleviate job losses during the COVID-19 crises. Specific focus was on identifying policy tools employed, timeliness of implementation and equitable distribution (i.e. consideration for women youths and people with disabilities) using policy design and crisis management theoretical lenses. Secondary data, comprised of Nigerian Economic Sustainability Plan [NESP] (2020) document, relevant reports books, and articles. Content analysis and thematic approach were used to analyse and present results. Findings suggests the NESP emphasizes private sector targeted policy interventions comprised of incentives, regulations, and direct provision of goods and services as policy tools. Timing of relief delivery varied for different policies. Monetary and fiscal policy were substantially implemented promptly, but real sector measures recorded delays. Equity was largely ignored in most interventions and there are reports alleging poor transparency in the disbursement. The paper concludes that using equity-focused standards and rapid-response strategies can help Nigeria deliver swift and inclusive interventions that protect vulnerable populations against future shocks. Hence, the study recommends mainstreaming equity in policy design through integrating equity criteria (gender, youths, disability, geographic balance demographic criteria) as mandatory component of all future economic palliatives; improving transparency and accountability in disbursement processes through publishing of disbursement data and; civil society empowerment to track funds release and implementation.

**Keywords:** *COVID-19, Equity, Policy Tools, Palliatives, Job loss*



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The advent of COVID-19 in Nigeria in 2020 (and enforcement of the pandemic's protocol such as social distancing and lockdown) forced workers' productivity to decline (PWC, 2020; World Bank, 2020). Consequently, massive job loss was reported as one of the consequences of deteriorating economic climate amplified by the pandemic (Business Day Newspaper, August 20, 2020; IATA, 2020; Siyan, et al., 2020). For instance, National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], (2020) estimates that 27.1 percent of Nigeria's total labour force (of about 80.29 million people) became jobless in the second quarter of 2020. The aviation industry alone is estimated to have lost about 149,400 jobs to COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria (Siyan, et al., 2020; IATA, 2020). Numerous micro and small business experienced declined productivity and job losses (NBS, 2020). Banks were also alleged to be moving for massive retrenchment (Ngwu, May 6, 2020; Olukotun, May 8, 2020) to cope with the realities of the COVID-19 induced recession before the intervention of Central Bank of Nigeria (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2020).

To stem the negative effects of the pandemic on the economy and jobs, several regulatory and policy interventions were undertaken initially by regulators such as Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN] in piecemeal (Centre for Policy Impact in Global Health, 2020; Centre for Policy Response, June, 2020). However, the Federal Government of Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari subsequently launched a comprehensive policy document titled: Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan [2020] (ESC, Plan, 2020) to provide holistic interventions, palliatives and stimulus measures.

It seems evident that the launch and implementation of NESP, (2020) triggered marginal economic growth, especially given the country's exit from recession during its implementation (dRPC & PAWED, 2021, March). Nevertheless, concerns about the policy have been documented in extant literature. For instance, the policy is faulted for not contributing significantly to national development (Anam, et. al. 2024), delayed implementation of relief have also been highlighted (Ohonba, & Ogbeide, 2023; Budgit, 2021; Andam, et al., 2020; Business Day Newspaper, 2020, August 20). Contrary to the reported response speed, timeliness is widely recognized as a cornerstone of effective crisis management, thus rapid response is considered as crucial for governments and institutions to contain shocks, minimize social disruption, and prevent escalation of crises (Boin et al., 2016). Conversely, delayed interventions often exacerbate vulnerabilities, leading to higher social and financial costs (Coombs, 2014).

Again, on equity, female gender marginalization has been reported (dRPC & PAWED, 2021, March) to be evident in the NESP document, despite the widespread notion that crises generally disproportionately affect women, youths, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) due to their peculiar contextual limitations. Women, for instance are predominantly engaged in informal and care-related work, making them more vulnerable to income disruptions and increase in unpaid caregiving responsibilities (UN Women, 2020; Alon et al., 2020). For youths, crises intensify unemployment risks and create long-term negative impacts on their future career opportunities



(ILO, 2020; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). PWDs, when often excluded from relief measures, face systemic barriers to healthcare and social protection (WHO, 2011; Banks et al., 2017).

The foregoing dynamics highlight the need for a study that assesses alignment of interventions, timeliness of response and comprehensive review of inclusivity/equity disposition of the NESP 2020 policy. However, extant literature (Anam, et. al. 2024; Mikloda 2021; dRPC & PAWED, 2021, March; dRPC & PAWED, nd.; Oginni, et. al. 2020, June) have not yet to the best of knowledge of this research undertaken such an assessment and that has created a knowledge void. Consequently, this study seeks to: assess the NESP, 2020 document and its actual implementation based on publicly available data and using the policy design and crisis management lenses. The study specifically seeks to identify the precise policy tools used, ascertain how prompt implementation were carried out as well as the policy's adherence to equity [i.e assess if special provision are made for women, youths, and PWDs].

The remaining part of this paper is organized as follows: 2.0 is covers Literature Review and Theoretical Framework, 3.0 focuses on Methodology, 4.0 entails Data Presentation and Analysis, and Findings while 5.0 covers Summary Conclusion and the Way Forward.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section covers conceptual clarification, empirical review and theoretical framework

### **2.1 Conceptual Clarification**

Relevant concepts clarified here include equity, palliative and public policy tools.

#### **2.1.1 Equity**

Equity in public administration refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of public resources, opportunities, and services among diverse social groups (Frederickson, 1990). Unlike equality, which focuses on providing the same resources all, equity seeks to ensure similar outcomes for disadvantaged or marginalized populations, eliminate systemic barriers and promote inclusive governance through policies sensitive to social, economic, and cultural contexts (Gooden, 2014). Equity in Public Administration was championed by New Public Administration (NPA) movement which challenged the traditional focus on efficiency and economy by advocating social equity as a core value of governance (Frederickson, 1997). Key principles of equity include inclusiveness, responsiveness, and proportionality ensuring marginalized groups receive adequate support to achieve comparable outcomes (Gooden, 2014).

Equity in Nigeria's public service is promoted through measures such as the Federal Character Principle which mandates fair representation of all states in appointments and resource allocation (Federal Character Commission Act, 1996; Ikpebe, et al., 2025). Quota systems in education and recruitment ensure regional and gender balance, (Nwoba, & Nwokwu, 2018; Omeje, et al, 2016) while gender equality policies advocate women's inclusion in socio-economic and governance



space (Ayodeji, & Ade-Ibijola, 2022). Again, equity is evident in social programmes such as: the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) and conditional cash transfers that target vulnerable populations (World Bank, nd).

Critics, of equity argue that it can lead to sacrificing merit, administrative complexity, politicization (Ikpebe, et al., 2025; Rosenbloom, et al., 2022) but regardless of concerns, equity remains an integral pillar of modern public administration.

### **2.1.2 Palliative**

Palliative is a concept that has roots in medical sciences, and is seen as a form of specialized medical care designed to enhance the quality of life of patients with serious, chronic, or life-threatening conditions (Dzierżanowski, 2021; Kelley, & Meier, 2010).

Palliative as used in this paper to refer to government's socio-economic relief intervention deployed as policy measures to ease immediate hardships (such as job losses, unemployment, loss of income) during economic and social crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Palliative is used interchangeably with terms such as social relief, social protection and relief package (Barrientos, & Hulme, 2009). Social relief/palliative interventions include direct cash transfers, food aid, subsidies, and unemployment/special employment benefits (Barrientos, & Hulme, 2009). For instance, it is reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, over 200 countries implemented palliative measures like stimulus checks and food assistance to support vulnerable populations (Gentilini et al., 2022).

### **2.1.3 Public Policy Tools**

Public policy tools, also known as public policy instruments, are the mechanisms governments use to achieve policy objectives (Howlett, 2011). They include a variety of approaches such as regulations, incentives, subsidies, taxes, public information campaigns, and service delivery mechanisms (Salamon, 2002). Tools can also be categorized as substantive (directly providing goods or services) and procedural, which shape policy processes and stakeholder participation (Vedung, 1998). Effective selection of tools requires alignment with policy goals, feasibility, and the socio-political context to ensure successful implementation (Tosun & Treib, 2018). Poorly chosen or mismatched tools often lead to policy failure, particularly when objectives and instruments lack coherence (Matland, 1995). In dynamic environments, tool choice also reflects considerations of flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and administrative capacity. Thus, understanding policy tools is central to policy design, as they serve as the operational link between intentions and outcomes. Salamon, (2002pp.22-24) posits that tools can be assessed using five criteria which are: i. Efficiency, ii. Effectiveness, iii. Equity, iv. Legitimacy & Political feasibility as well as v. Manageability. This study utilizes Efficiency (timely/ prompt implementation) and Equity criteria in assessing policy tools.



## 2.2 Empirical Review

Several extant studies have applied policy design and crises management theories/ frameworks in investigations related to socio-economic crises. For example, a research on the COVID-19 pandemic across 35 countries found that policy integration combining health, economic, and social measures was critical for effective crisis response. Two main policy design approaches emerged: one viewing health and economic measures as complementary (integrated response), and another perceiving a trade-off between them. The study highlights that integrated policy design can accelerate problem-solving capacity and foster adaptation of new social policies in response to crises (Maggetti, & Trein, 2022).

Sánchez, & Jiménez-Fernández, (2023) examined the European Union (EU) Cohesion Policy for 2021–2027 and analyzed the impact of COVID-19 crisis on vulnerability among member states. The study sought to identify the factors driving socio-economic fragility and resilience in terms of the 2021–2027 EU Cohesion Policy goals. To achieve the study's objective, findings from social and economic effects of COVID-19 were utilized to examine the impact such COVID-19 shock on regional vulnerability (via the random or stochastic part of the models). The study found regional disparities i.e. COVID-19 disproportionately worsens vulnerability, influenced by education, stability, and poverty factors and proposes a socio-economic vulnerability index for EU fund allocation.

Another empirical study explored the operational role of design theory in generating policy alternatives, emphasizing early stakeholder engagement and innovative approaches to public decision-making. The pilot case study on groundwater protection policy in Italy illustrated how design thinking can be applied to support the development of effective policy alternatives for socio-economic and environmental challenges (Pluchinotta, et al. 2019).

A systematic review of crisis event studies on the other hand identified that crises often drive learning and adaptation in government structures, leading to more robust and flexible policy processes. Key dynamics include agenda setting, policy formulation, and implementation, with learning from crisis events shaping future socio-economic resilience (Zhang, et al. 2023)

Similarly, empirical research in Pakistan by Iftikhar, et al. (2021) examined crises in megaprojects and on the strategies used to cope with them. The study categorized crises into internal/external and technical/economic or social types, linking them to specific coping strategies such as communication, coordination, resource mobilization, and negotiation. These highlights the importance of context-specific crisis management strategies for addressing socio-economic disruptions in large-scale projects.

A few studies have attempted to apply the design and crises management theory/perspective to the inquiry of policies in Nigeria. For instance, Aliyu (2002) conducted policy mapping using the *Policymaker* software (Microsoft-Windows®), drawing on literature reviews, document analysis,



expert interviews, and consensus opinions to propose a model National Emergency Health Policy with defined goals, objectives, programs, and evaluation benchmarks. Aliyu concludes that the proposed framework could support a sustainable emergency health policy in Nigeria (Aliyu 2002).

Gungah, et al. (2019) similarly examined Nigeria's Renewable Energy policy design using a case study approach to specifically assess appraise the effectiveness, efficiency, equity and institutional feasibility of Nigeria's RE legal and policy framework. The study highlighted the pressing need for coordinated legal frameworks, clear time-bound targets, strong political will, effective policy design, adequate research funding, and active public engagement to advance renewable energy development in Nigeria.

Again, Okunade and Ogunnubi (2020) examined the humanitarian crisis in northeastern Nigeria using a phenomenological case study approach. They found that uncoordinated stakeholder responses and government shortcomings led to neglected border communities and poor conditions for IDPs, particularly affecting women and children.

Empirical studies reviewed so far highlight various practical dimensions that policy design and crises management theory seem relevant in the analysis of policies/ socio-economic challenges. These include for instance, policy design's utility in the assessment of integrated policy responses, as seen in COVID-19 (Maggetti & Trein, 2022) and EU vulnerability analyses (Sánchez & Jiménez-Fernández, 2023). Studies also highlight that stakeholder-driven design improved environmental policies (Pluchinotta et al., 2019). Other empirical submissions that apply policy design to inquiry reveal Nigeria's fragmented approaches in health (Aliyu, 2002) and renewable energy (Gungah et al., 2019). Crisis management on the other hand has been seen to emphasize learning and adaptation (Zhang et al., 2023; Iftikhar et al., 2021), yet Nigerian humanitarian crises remain poorly managed (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2020). Gaps from empirical studies on both policy design and crises management theory include limited Nigerian applications, weak integration of both theories in a single study, and insufficient equity-focused analyses of vulnerable groups which this study seeks to fill.

## **2.3 Theoretical framework**

Policy responses during crises require both coherent design and rapid adaptability. Hence, this study is underpinned upon two relevant theories, namely: policy design theory and crisis management theory.

### **2.3.1 Policy design theory**

Policy Design is a branch of policy science and a theoretical perspective that emerged in the 1970s from writings of policy formulation and implementation scholars (Sidney, 2007; Howlett, & Lejano, 2013). Prominent contributors to this perspective include Michael Howlett, (Howlett, & Mukherjee, 2018; Howlett, & Lejano, 2013), Mara Sidney (Sidney, 2007) Christopher Hood



(Hood, 1986) and Linder Stephen (Linder, & Peters, 1987). The policy design perspective is anchored on the notion that policy designs significantly contribute to implementation and outcomes (Colebatch, 2018; Howlett, & Lejano, 2013; Howlett, & Mukherjee, 2018; Sidney, 2007). Another belief of policy design theorists is that every public policy contains a design, a framework of ideas and instruments to be identified and analyzed (Sidney, 2007). Other core principles generally include emphasis on *Goal–Means Fit* (alignment between policy objectives and tools [i.e. means of achieving goals]) (Matland, 1995; Tosun & Treib, 2018), *Instrumentality* (appropriate tools should be selected for solving concerned problems), *Rational Choice* (optimizing outcomes) (Hood, 1986), *Intentionality* (design is a purposeful or deliberate activity), and *Context Sensitivity* (influence of institutional, socio-cultural, and political forces must be factored in) (Howlett, & Mukherjee, 2018). This framework posits that well-designed policies are more likely to lead to effective implementation (Howlett, & Mukherjee, 2018; Linder, & Peters, 1987).

Despite its value, policy design theory has limitations. It overemphasizes design while overlooking other factors that may undermine performance despite careful planning (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2018). The theory assumes coherence and rationality, though emergencies and limited information constrain decisions (Stone, 2012; Fischer, 2003). Regardless of constraints, policy design theory still offers useful insights into framing policies and their implementation.

### **2.3.2 Crisis management theory**

Crisis Management Theory (CMT) originated from organizational studies and public administration in the late 20th century. Hermann (1963) defined crises as unexpected, high-threat events demanding urgent decisions, while Mitroff (1983, 2004) broadened the scope to include preparedness and post-crisis learning. Boin et al. (2005) advanced the theory by emphasizing sense-making, decision-making, coordination, and accountability as core leadership tasks. CMT assumes crises are inevitable and unpredictable but manageable through anticipation, rapid response, and institutional design (Pearson & Clair, 1998). Hence, crisis management places special emphasis on timing as a determinant of effectiveness. Early and decisive action can mitigate crisis impacts, while delays can exacerbate economic and social harm (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1993).

Critics of crisis management theory however argue that it overemphasizes managerial control, neglects structural inequalities, socio-political dynamics, and remains reactive rather than resilience-focused. Again, its Western-centric orientation also limits applicability in diverse governance and cultural contexts (Rosenthal et al., 2001; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992).

### **2.3.3 Application of Policy Design Theory and Crisis Management Theory to the Study**

Integrating both theories therefore provides a robust lens for analyzing economic palliatives implemented during crises, such as COVID-19 in Nigeria. While Policy design theory is used to



evaluate whether interventions such as, wage subsidies, and tax relief and incentives were that are relevant to crisis response were clearly articulated to deliver efficient response while. Similarly, Equity as a key element of social justice in public administration as used in this study is in line with the principle of context sensitivity proposed by the policy design theory. Crisis management theory on the other hand is used to assess the promptness in timing relief interventions under COVID-19 emergency in the study. This combined perspective helps explain gaps in operational details, context sensitivity as reflected by equity and prompt implementation, which often undermine the effectiveness of crisis response and has implications on job losses.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This study is a qualitative research and utilized secondary data comprising of the NESP (2020) document, other relevant publications of government, nongovernmental organizations, journals and newspapers articles. Google and Google Scholar search engine were used to source literature and relevant data. Key search words include: COVID-19 palliative in Nigeria, Government relief to cushion effects of COVID-19 pandemic on Job losses in Nigeria, etcetera. Data is presented thematically, while content analysis technique was employed to make sense of data. To identify the policy tools in the NESP (2020) the study relies on the categories suggested in literature (Salamon, 2002; Vedung, 1998) which include regulations, incentives, subsidies, taxes, and directly providing goods or services.

### **4.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

This section covers the presentation of data and analysis of result and findings.

#### **4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section engages data from the NESP (2020) document and other publicly available information to identify the type public policy tools used in the NESP (2020), ascertain how timely/promptly relief were provided and assess the extent of adherence to equity through special consideration of women, youths and People Living with Disabilities (PLWD).

##### **4.1.1 Government Policy and Alleviation of the Impact of Covid-19 on Jobs Losses in Nigeria**

To ameliorate effects of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, some fiscal policy measures were developed early by Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, March 3, 2020). However, a comprehensive policy document that embodies various policy instruments meant to alleviate the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on Jobs and communicate government's socio-economic response to the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic is the Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan [2020] (ESC Plan, 2020). NESP, (2020) was developed by Economic Sustainability Committee (ESC) which was established on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 by then President Muhammadu Buhari (State House, 2020, June 25; dRPC & PAWED, 2020, March). NESP was later approved by the Federal Executive Council (FEC) on June 24, 2020 (State House, 2020 June 25). The broad vision of NESP



is to retain and create jobs and increase productivity through strategies that ensures mass employment and mass domestic production, which are not dependent on importation or foreign exchange expenditure (ESC Plan, 2020p.20). The general strategic objectives of NESP are five (5) and are aligned with the broad vision. Objective five (v) of NESP (2020) hinges on equity “Extend protection to the very poor and other vulnerable groups including women and persons living with disabilities through pro-poor spending” (ESC Plan, 2020p.11).

The NESP also rests on three key pillars namely: *real sector measure, fiscal and monetary measures* and *implementation*. i. *real sector measures* (comprise of project and policy approaches, focused on the creation of jobs across various sectors such agriculture and housing, energy etcetera with the aim of safeguard existing micro, small and medium scale businesses and boosting productivity. ii. *fiscal and monetary measures* comprise of regulatory interventions meant to maximize government revenue, optimize government expenditure, ensure prudence and boost investments) and iii. *implementation* [governance and institutional structure for implementing the NESP assigned to Ministries and Committees] (ESC Plan, 2020p.11).

#### **4.1.1.1 Public Policy Tools for Alleviating COVID-19 Induced Jobs Losses in the NESP (2020)**

This section examines the relevant policy tools relevant to jobs creation, job losses reduction/job retention in the NESP (2020), identify and classifies items under the following categories: *regulations, incentives, subsidies, taxes, public information campaigns, and directly provision of goods or services* put forward in literature (Salamon, 2002; Vedung, 1998), examines the promptness of response/ adherence to timeline for implementation of relief and finally assesses adherence to equity through special consideration of women, youths and PLWD. This assessment shall specifically be based on the key pillars of NESP, (2020), namely: *fiscal policy measures, monetary policy measures* and *real sector measures*.

##### **4.1.1.1.1 Monetary Policy Measures**

Public policy tools utilized under monetary policy comprise of *incentive* and *regulation*. Incentives that constitute the monetary policy measures include: loans to private sector, interest rate reduction example: item i. N1tn in loans to boost local manufacturing and production across critical sector, other incentives include item vi and x. Regulation on the other hand include regulatory directives. For instance, item number viii; grant regulatory forbearance to banks to restructure terms of facilities in affected sectors, item vi focused on interest rate review., while other are directives comprising of items ii, iii, iv, vi viii, ix (ESC Plan, 2020p.34). Implementation timeline for all monetary policy measures was set at twelve (12) months. It is apparent from the way policy tools/instruments are stated under *monetary policy measures* that women, youths and People Living with Disabilities (PLWD) were not given special consideration.



#### 4.1.1.1.2 Fiscal policy measures

There are four categories of fiscal policy measures and they include: 1. the immediate fiscal policy measures, 2. fiscal measures to safeguard oil revenues, 3. fiscal measures to mobilise and preserve non-oil revenues and 4. fiscal measures to reduce non-essential spending. The implementation timeline for all fiscal policy measures is 12 months except for fiscal measures to mobilise and preserve non-oil revenues where the timeline is not stated.

**4.1.1.1.2.1 The Immediate Fiscal Policy Measures:** this section has three components namely: i. *Specific measures to support the private sector*, ii. *Measures to support the health sector* and iii. *Accelerate infrastructure completion*. Policy items (policy tools) designed to support the private sector here include: incentives and regulation. Incentives include for example item **i**. Activate the provisions of the Finance Act 2020 in support of MSMEs and item **iv**. Incentivize employers to retain and recruit staff during the economic downturn, others are item v, vi,. Regulation include for instance, item **iii**. Extend deadlines and suspend penalties for filing tax returns and item ii.

The policy tools /items under *measures to support the health sector* are incentives (packaged as loans, grants and remuneration), for example: items ii. Provide funding to pharmaceutical sector to support the procurement of raw materials and equipment required to boost local drug production, and item iii. Similarly, the category of policy tool used under *accelerate infrastructure completion* is direct provision of public goods/services. The specific tool under this is item ii which specifically intends to accelerate the construction of 794.4km of approved roads and bridges under Road Infrastructure Tax Credit Scheme (RITCS).

#### 4.1.1.1.2.2 Other Categories of Fiscal Policy Measures

Other categories of fiscal policy measures in the NESP, (2020) include: *Fiscal measures to safeguard oil revenues*, *Fiscal measures to mobilise and preserve non-oil revenues* and *Fiscal measures to reduce non-essential spending*. These measures dwell mainly on regulatory measures to manage and optimize government revenue and ensure financial prudence. Only item vii under the *Fiscal measures to mobilise and preserve non-oil revenues* is relevant to prevention of job losses and promotion of job creation. The said item vii can be classified as direct provision of public goods as a category of public policy tool. It is stated thus as: *Incentivise the use of up to N2tn of pension funds for roads and housing development* (ESC Plan, 2020p33).

It is evident from all the foregoing fiscal policy measures that, the policy tools include *Incentives* that were packaged as loans, grants, intervention funds and remuneration. Similarly, there are *regulations* that are in form of directives and administrative actions as well as *direct provision of public goods* which mainly entailed construction works involving roads and housing projects embedding contracts. It is further evident that no special attention is accorded to women, youths and People Living with Disabilities (PLWD) under this measure.



#### **4.1.1.1.3 Real Sector Measures (Measures for Direct/Indirect Sustenance/Creation of Jobs)**

Policy tools employed under the real sector segment of NESP (2020) can be broadly classified as *incentives, regulation, and direct provision of goods /services*. *Incentives* (are packaged as loans, grants and intervention funds, guaranteed off-take). For example under Food for All: Agriculture and Food Security section item ii. Which seeks to provide small holder farmers access to interest-free credit with a small administrative charge and also item v are incentives (ESC Plan, 2020p.40), similarly, under the section that targets support to SMEs, SME Survival Fund which aims at sustaining at least 500,000 jobs in 50,000 SMEs by providing grants to support SME payroll obligations for 3 months (ESC Plan, 2020p.55) is an incentive. *Regulation* (include directives), for instance item vi in track 2 of Mass housing section has "Issuance of Executive Order on the implementation of the National Public Buildings Maintenance Policy" as a regulatory policy tool, item ii. under digital outsourcing (ESC Plan, 2020p.48) is also a regulatory tool.

*Direct provision of goods /services* has items under Mass housing construction and direct labour in national infrastructure projects known as 774,000 jobs across all LGAs in the country (ESC Plan, 2020p.42 & p.45). It is imperative to note that policy measures under real sector section integrate diverse segments of the economy and are targeted support to private sector (businesses and entities) and this aligns with the development aspiration of the country. However, women, youths and People Living with Disabilities (PLWD) were not accorded special attention, except that youths were mentioned as target beneficiaries of N-Power Programme (an existing social intervention programme). Women were also casually mentioned.

#### **4.1.2 Promptness in the Implementation of Economic Palliative Measures for Alleviating COVID-19 Induced Jobs Losses and Adherence to Equity**

Attempt is made here to assess the promptness of implementation of the policy items as well as adherence to equity during implementation based on publicly available data.

##### **4.1.2.1 Promptness in Implementation of Monetary and Fiscal Policy Measures**

Available evidence from different sources (Mikloda, 2021; KPMG, July, 2022; dRPC & PAWED, 2021, March; World Bank. 2020, December; CBN, 2020, March 3; Popoola, May 28, 2020) suggests that implementation of most of the monetary and fiscal policy measures began in a timely manner in line with specified timeline. For instance, CBN circular of March 2020 and Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) announcement of March 24, 2020 addressed a number of the items of Monetary and fiscal policy list (CBN, 2020, March 3; World Bank. 2020, December).

##### **4.1.2.1 Promptness in Implementation of Real Sector Measures**

Narrations from various sources suggests that real sector measures were however not implemented as swiftly as the monetary and fiscal policy measures (Budgit, 2021; NAN, 2021 in The Guardian



Newspaper; African Aerospace Online News Service, 2020, November 9). For instance, various components of the payroll support palliative package were reported to have only commenced towards the end of 2020 (NAN, 2021). A report citing former Vice President Osinbajo's briefing of then President Muhammadu Buhari on January 5, 2021 suggest that implementation of payroll support began only in October, 2020, about four (4) months after the ratification of NESP (NAN, 2021). The report revealed that 277,628 beneficiaries comprised of 20,614 beneficiaries for October, and 257,014 beneficiaries for November and December, 2020 drawn from 56,575 businesses had been paid payroll support of either ₦30,000 or ₦50,000 (NAN, 2021).

Similarly, ₦30,000 one-time grants to 333,000 artisans across the country was reported to have commenced under streams 1, 2, and 3 toward the end of year 2020 (10 states across the six geo-political zones and the FCT had commenced) (NAN, 2021 in The Guardian Newspaper; Anam, et. al. 2024). Budgit, (2021) and dRPC & PAWED, (March, 2021) corroborates the delay in funds release and implementation of COVID-19 economic palliatives. Similarly delayed implementation was also recorded for stimulus bailout fund to aviation sector (Aliyu, January 6, 2021). Funds release was delayed for almost two months after approved. Approval of fund was on November 9, 2020 (Okeke, 2020, November 2, in Business Day Newspaper) but disbursement was carried out only in the last week of December 2020 (Aliyu, 2021, January 6). The disbursement delay came despite almost about five (5) months delay between the ratification of NESP, (2020) on June 24, 2020 (State House, 2020 June 3) and the approval of the COVID-19 aviation bailout fund in November 2020 (Aliyu, 2021, January 6; Okeke, 2020, November 2).

#### **4.1.3 Adherence to Equity**

This section analyses adherence to equity based on evidence in the NESP (2020) document and publicly available data on the implementation of the NESP.

##### **4.1.3.1 Adherence to Equity Based on the Content of the NESP**

NESP (2020)'s objective number v (five) expressed as *Extend protection to the very poor and other vulnerable groups including women and People Living With Disability (PLWD) through pro-poor spending*: seem to support equity through special consideration of the highlighted vulnerable. However, a careful perusal of the entire NESP (2020) document (the various policy measures, the and the specific policy tools [items]) suggests that women, youths and PLWD were not accorded adequate attention, except for trivial mention of youths and women in section 13 titled: *Jobs for Youths and Women Post Covid-19* (ESC Plan, 2020p.45) dRPC and PAWED, corroborates the foregoing gap (dRPC & PAWED, 2021, Marchp.5). Similarly, youths were highlighted only as target beneficiaries of the N-Power (an existing programme) and direct labour in national infrastructure projects known as 774,000 jobs across all LGAs in the country (ESC



Plan, 2020p.42 & p.45) but were not given further consideration in other parts of the document. PLWD were however evidently relegated to the background in the NESP (2020) document.

#### **4.1.3.2 Adherence to Equity Based on Publicly Available Data of Implementation of the NESP**

Evidence from publicly available data suggests that women and People Living with Disabilities (PLWD) only received special consideration during implementation of MSME Survival fund, as 45% slots of beneficiaries of payroll support grant were allocated to businesses owned by women and 5% to PLWD (dRPC & PAWED, 2021, March). While the foregoing gesture reflects an attempt to ensure equity by guaranteeing that these categories of vulnerable and their micro/small businesses were protected, numerous other interventions did not provide such.

Hence, arising from both evidences derived from the content of the NESP document and publicly available data (Budgit, 2021; dRPC & PAWED, 2021, March; Akinwale, 2020), it is indicative that women, youths and People Living with Disabilities (PLWD) interest were not integrated firmly into the NESP policy, except for trivial mention and allocation of a negligible fraction of programme slots. dRPC and PAWED, affirms the foregoing gap when they revealed that *ESP has no specific women-focused economic empowerment programs, except for the lump sum programme titled "Jobs for Youths and Women Post Covid-19"* arguing further they averred that *Most of empowerment programmes was not gender disaggregated* (dRPC & PAWED, 2021, Marchp.5).

#### **4.2 Findings**

Arising from the data presented and analysed in section 3.0 above, the following are specific findings that emanate from this study.

**i. Private Sector Centered Interventions and Diverse Policy Tools Deployed:** NESP (2020) utilized a blend of instruments broadly categorized by the authors as: *incentives, regulations and direct provision of goods and services* across three pillars: monetary policy, fiscal policy and real sector (examples are. MSME incentives, tax relief, infrastructure investment loans, rate cuts, regulatory forbearance). These measures, targeted at private sector, aligns with the country's developmental aspiration aimed at significant economic growth through productive private sector (ESC Plan, 2020) and this reinforces the policy design submission that policy design is a deliberate attempt to align policy objectives with means (Howlett, & Mukherjee, 2018).

**ii. Generally Timely Fiscal and Monetary Response:** Most monetary and fiscal policy measures were enacted promptly as evidenced by the CBN's early March 2020 directives and FIRS tax reliefs in March 2020 demonstrating good alignment with the stated 12-month implementation



timeline. This finding affirms the crisis management submission that prompt response mitigate crisis impacts (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1993).

**iii. Delayed Implementation for Real Sector Measures:** The rollout of real sector interventions began mostly from in late 2020, exemplified by payroll support payments to over 277,000 beneficiaries and one-off grants for artisans. Similarly, some interventions, like the aviation sector bailout, faced delays of nearly two months.

**iv. Equity Largely Overlooked:** Although NESP's objective five emphasizes support for vulnerable groups, including women and PLWD, most policy tools lacked targeted provisions for these groups. Mentions of women, youth, and PLWD were limited and superficial across the document. This finding contradicts the policy design theory principle that emphasizes context sensitivity (Howlett, & Mukherjee, 2018; Howlett, & Mukherjee, 2018; Linder, & Peters, 1987).

**v. Limited Equity Gains in Implementation:** Only the MSME Survival Fund demonstrated explicit equity consideration—allocating 45% of payroll support slots to women-owned businesses and 5% to PLWD. Other interventions failed to meaningfully incorporate equity or disaggregate beneficiaries by gender or disability.

## 5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

This section summarizes the study, concludes and offers suggestions on the way forward.

### 5.1 Summary and Conclusion

The study evaluated Nigeria's economic palliatives for mitigating job losses during COVID-19 crises by focusing on NESP, (2020) and its economic palliatives. Specific emphasis was placed on assessing categories of policy tools used, promptness of implementation and equitable distribution. Insights from the NESP emphasize private sector centered targeted policy approach comprised of incentives, regulations, and direct provision of goods and services. To conclude, this paper contends that by blending policy design frameworks with crisis management approaches (i.e. embracing equity-focused standards, enhanced monitoring mechanisms, and rapid-response strategies), Nigeria can deliver swift, inclusive interventions that protect vulnerable populations and bolster economic resilience against future shocks.

### 5.2 The Way Forward

Arising from the above findings, the following are suggested as the way forward;

**i. Strengthen Equity Mainstreaming in Policy Design:** Make equity criteria (gender, disability, geographic balance) mandatory in all economic palliative schemes. Include measurable equity targets (e.g., % of funds to women-owned SMEs) in program guidelines before rollout.



- ii. Institutionalize Timeliness Benchmarks:** Develop a *Crisis Response Implementation Framework* with sector-specific deadlines for disbursement and public reporting. Link fund release to a real-time monitoring dashboard accessible to oversight bodies.
- iii. Strengthen Relief Response Readiness:** Pre-identify and pre-qualify potential beneficiaries (e.g., SMEs, cooperatives) of relief during non-crisis periods to shorten verification time. Secure enabling partnerships with banks, fintechs, and trade associations for rapid fund transfer during emergencies.
- iv. Enhance Transparency and Public Accountability:** Publish disbursement data amounts, dates, beneficiaries quarterly in open formats online and in newspapers. Independent auditors and civil society should be also empowered as stakeholders to track palliative fund flows and performance.
- v. Build Equity-Sensitive Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E):** Incorporate gender-disaggregated, disability-disaggregated, and regional-disaggregated indicators in M&E frameworks. Require post-implementation evaluations to assess whether vulnerable groups actually benefited as intended.
- vi. Integrate Policy Learning into Future Plans:** Use lessons from NESP's gaps to design *Crisis Preparedness Policy Manuals* for future economic palliatives that combine speed, clarity, and fairness. Create inter-ministerial simulation exercises to stress-test and simulate these ideas.



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