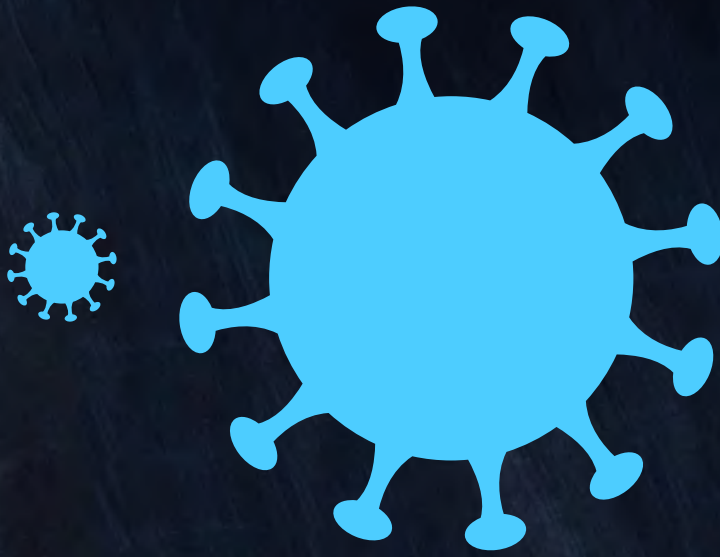


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COVID-19:

Lessons and Implications for Public Policy-Making Processes in Cameroon

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INTRODUCTION

Public policies can rightly be viewed as a political system's responses to public demands and problems arising from its environment in domains as, transportation, education, agriculture, health, law enforcement, security, business, and so on, depending upon whether a chosen policy approach falls within the ambit of constituent, distributive, redistributive, regulatory policy type. Policy problems are conditions or situations, which generate a human need, deprivation or dissatisfaction, self-identified by a group or groups of people, for which relief is sought for a large number of people in society. On the contrary, it is not a policy problem if it affects only a few persons in society.

Talking of the political system, it comprises the identifiable and interrelated institutions and their activities, otherwise known as governmental institutions and political processes, which authoritatively allocate values in form of decisions, which are binding upon society. Certainly, binding as these decisions are, and going by this view of public policies; what character of policy responses has Cameroon enunciated against COVID-19; and what are the lessons and implications of these responses on the human capital and economy Cameroon now in the future? Are the policy responses against COVID-19 akin to impromptu approach with weak physiognomies? Are there alternative policies open to Cameroon for combating COVID-19?

Confronted by these worries, this study undertakes an empirical and content analysis methodology to examine relevant primary and secondary data, for divulging

what character of policy responses has Cameroon enunciated against COVID-19; and what are the lessons and implications of these responses on the human capital and economy Cameroon now in the future?

Cameroon's chosen policy, which Anderson (2011) calls, "spur-of-the-moment approach" against COVID-19. Specifically, it assesses this approach in relation to the impulsive massive loss of human and material capital, including Cameroon's economic downturn; and highlights lessons and policy implications in the approach; while suggesting alternative policy. It is worth recalling that, since the early 2020, COVID-19 has been ravaging the Cameroon society, especially its human capital and the economy; with the trepidation of re-occurrence.

As Annoh a medic in the gynaecology and obstetrics hospital in Douala said on 6th May 2020, « ...this hospital, like others in the country is short of supply of protective equipment - caps, coveralls, protective glasses, visors and gloves and medicines; and with the influx of COVID-19 patients over ten (10) daily, government should



urgently reverse its strategy in handling this pandemic by providing these equipment well in advance, rather than wait until we complain. With the death toll advancing towards 100 or more with over 2000 cases in the country, the present measures are inadequately devastating.” Thus, will Cameroon confront future pandemics with the same or different approach? The foregoing is the research problem, which this article will scientifically attempt to fix.

WEAKNESSES OF THE SPUR-OF-THE-MOMENT POLICY APPROACH: LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CAMEROON

Consequently, this study argues that, the primary weakness of the spur-of-the-moment approach, which also serves as a lesson and policy implication for Cameroon is that, “...it lacks major and profound scientific orientations for serving a nation in times of grave threats to human health and the economy, [such as the current scourge of COVID-19]” (Anderson, 2011). In a political system imbued with democracy, this approach is outdated; with the rational-comprehensive approach available to take precedence; including several other

approaches in the policy arena. This precedence is usually informed by the inbuilt mechanisms of the rational-comprehensive approach, which compels the propulsion of scientific reasoning, radiated from sound intellectual capabilities of the human mind, inundated with science-oriented inputs and mechanisms for taking into consideration several details from the concerned policy domain(s). For example, in Nigeria, during the early heydays of oil-boom, this rational-comprehensive served in augmenting the agricultural policy with “Operation Feed the Nation” under the Obasangjo’s military regime between 1978 and 1981. The regime imagined that, with the arrival of crude sales by Nigeria, agriculture which was hitherto the backbone of the economy will be relegated; consequently, people were instigated to embrace agricultural production with the creation juicy farmers’ cooperatives, agricultural centres, colleges and universities of agriculture in all parts of the country (Nwachukwu 2013, Egeonu 2015).

The rational-comprehensive policy approach enables policymakers to anticipate the development of socio-economic infrastructures against existing or future social problems. This approach, according to Dahl (2007) and other scholars, has proved very useful in solving anticipated problem occurrences in most developed countries, thus, it can as well work in Cameroon. For instance,

as Dahl (2007:57) posits, “during the Soviet Union’s deployment of missiles in Cuba, just a stone-throw to the seashore south-eastern borders of the US; it is this approach which the US employed in confronting the ‘Cuban Missile Crises in 1963, otherwise called the ‘Bay of Pigs’, between United States and the then Soviet Union.” Similarly, the Nigerian Guardian Newspaper of 27th October 2019, reports that, during the outbreak of the Ebola Fever in some countries in West Africa, Nigeria employed this approach to curb the spread of Ebola in Nigeria, through its anticipated installation of sound health and social structures/facilities, closing its borders with neighbouring countries to stem or accommodate future real or imagined cases of Ebola Fever.

Apart from its lack of any profound science-orientation, other weaknesses of the spur-of-the-moment approach include, its limited time-frame, (from its conception to its application); where by the society’s preparedness to willingly accept its outcomes (safety measures enunciated to combat a particular pandemic) should be well received and consummated. Due to its impromptu character, people become unduly resistance towards government, and in the case of a pandemic, the mortality rate becomes astronomical. However, I concede that even with the rational-comprehensive approach, the human mortality rate can rise during a pandemic. However, other factors, such as natural intervention, the undue peoples’ deviance and excessive exercise of democratic tenets of liberty in situations like in COVID-19, as the actions of some Americans in different states in the US illustrate.

As it has been applied in China, where the COVID-19 originated, the absence of excessive use of democratic tenets has

played the magic wand role, of low mortality rate, as compared to the figures in Western democratic societies. While not admonishing democracy, it behoves that people must exercise caution in its application. Another intrinsic weakness in the spur-of-the-moment approach is that, it is a harbinger of extensive repression rather than democracy. In societies which claim democratic credentials, certain policy measures appear retrogressive instead of progressive. For instance, not long before they had obeyed weeks of confinement, US citizens in several states of the US federation, starting advocating for policy change, by marching in streets asking for the opening up of the American society, despite the continuous ravage of the COVID-19 on human capital and the American economy. This is not because, the US applied the spur-of-the-moment approach, but because, confinement curtailed Americans’ liberties as a core value in their democracy. As Thomas Hobbes once said, “...refuse the human nature everything except his liberties...” So, while repression as an attribute of the spur-of-the-moment policy approach prods human safety, the policy itself has several disadvantages, especially its being spontaneous.

Although, operated as a human endeavour with probable limitations, the rational-comprehensive approach offers policymakers greater latitude for accommodating social problems. Consequently, it should largely guide Cameroon’s public policy-making processes. As a state, Cameroon should, during normal periods anticipate the erection of accommodative social, health and economic structures or facilities to counter futuristic outbreak of pandemics or even famine. Waiting to act only when a pandemic arises does not play well in the governing processes.

PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE SPUR-OF-THE-MOMENT APPROACH

Essentially, one major public policy implication arising from the spur-of-the-moment approach adopted by Cameroon against COVID-19 is the extensive of peril, which human capital and Cameroon's economy faces in the nearest, whose remedy can be achieved only if Cameroon decides to adopt an alternative public policy, to fight COVID-19. This article thus, suggests the adopted of the rational comprehensive approach, because, its application would only chase COVID-19 but would redress the battered national economy and safe large spectrum of human capital. As most people would agree, the extent of loss of manpower - university professors, farmers, transporters, bankers, engineers, artists – Manu Dibango, and so on; healthcare professionals, such as doctors and nurses, working husbands and wives; has greatly weakened Cameroon's economy. For instance, the grounding for weeks of the air, land and sea haulage systems, to and from Cameroon, the look-ups of manufacturing industries, wholesale and retail business houses, hotels and restaurants, limitation of open market operations, and even intellectual think-tanks outfits, most of whom may not obtain any substantial financial bail-outs from the state; pose enormous setbacks to economic re-take-offs and getting back to normalcy.

Thus, for Cameroon to re-build the shattered economy, without depending on donations and borrowing from advanced nations and other so-called development partners, who have equally been menaced by COVID-19, Cameroon must employ its own resources through an enlightened application of the rational-comprehensive approach. In this

direction, Cameroon should inject massive resources into the agricultural sector in order to boost food production in plantains, cocoyam, beans, maize, cassava, yams, sorghum, assorted vegetables, fish and meat within the few coming months and years. This country should not wait for the occurrence of widespread famine; to start planning on producing enough food for its remaining but teaming population after the COVID-19. The spur-of-the-moment approach has amply demonstrated wide paucity encountered by the government to stem the spread of COVID-19.

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Generally, if policy-making is anchored on intermittent responses, such as Cameroon's measures against COVID-19, the unavoidable population's inclinations are engagements into uncontrollable abuses of such policy measures. The arrest by the police of some people in Douala for disobeying government's measures against COVID-19 is illustrative (Abba, 2020, Aliyu 2020). As Debbie (2019) opines,

“Some key policy implications in intermittent policy approach are that, besides being expensive to implement, it worsens government's relations with populations; weakens several aspects of government work; its impromptu character with demand for immediate population's compliance renders it antagonistic. Governments, which do not predict social problems and project measures to counteract such problems respond to social problems, usually attract unpopularity from its population. Since policy beneficiaries are also the victims of social problems and are vaguely kept abreast of the problems' solutions, government-population relations are usually sour.”

Thus, there arise additional policy implications with the non-avoidance of the dearth of prior widespread policy knowledge. Cameroon needs to create anticipative social and economic structures that should radiate policy knowledge through several sources, with sequential projection and gradual approval by the population. Concerning healthcare, the policy knowledge must emanate directly from Cameroon's Ministries of Public Health and Communication and transmitted through existing health facilities, schools, colleges, universities, villages, community

based organisations, public spaces. If the government ignore this strategy, there is bound to be direct negative policy role that promotes policy deviancy amongst the population.

For instance, long ago, slogans such as “Speed Kills, Smoking is Dangerous to Health, Taking Alcohol While Driving Kills, and so on, are prior public health policy measures, which have saved several human lives in Cameroon. Conversely, slogans such as ‘Wash Your Hands Always,’ ‘Protect Oneself When Snitching or Coughing in Large Gatherings or Public Places,’ ‘Do Not Hug Irresponsibly,’ ‘Conduct Regular Health Check-Ups,’ and so on, can provide health incentives against epidemics or pandemics. In this direction, these slogans must permanently be heard or seen as a way of life in the Cameroon society, with constant updates when necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

This study undertook an empirical analysis of relevant primary and secondary data, to divulge Cameroon's policy towards the menace of COVID-19 in the country. The article argued that, Cameroon's policy responses grounded on the “spur-of-the-moment approach”, against COVID-19 have enormous shortfalls to serve a nation at times of severe health challenges as orchestrated by COVID-19, given the subtle but growing deaths rate now surpassing 100 people. Specifically, it assessed this approach in relation to the impulsive massive loss of material and human capital, including the threat to the economy. It highlighted some salient lessons and policy implications from the approach and suggests alternative policy. It examined and explained public polices as responses of the political system to public

demands arising from its environment; that, the political system comprises those identifiable and interrelated institutions and their activities, otherwise known as governmental institutions and political processes, which authoritatively allocate values – decisions, which are binding upon society.

From the aforesaid analysis we discovered that, Cameroon applied the spur-of-the-moment approach; and that this approach portends enormous shortcomings in solving the huge health risks occasioned by COVID-19 upon Cameroon's human capital and the economy. The article demonstrates how and why the character of decisions made by Cameroon on COVID-19, did not receive adequate compliance from the policy beneficiaries – the population. Consequently, it advocates the adoption of appropriate alternative policy now and in the future, which among others should be the rational-comprehensive approach. Since this approach has a wide spectrum of advantages over the one used by Cameroon, we believe COVID-19 and other pandemics

can be curtailed. As an augmentation of Cameroon's health policy, the article suggests the re-introduction of Preventive Medicines Centres, health officers, sanitary overseas or inspectors, whose were primary focuses were on tropical diseases and rural areas.

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