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Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations in the Digital Age in Nigeria

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Professor Idorenyin Udoesen Akpan



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APPLICATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA FOR THE CONTAINMENT OF CORONA VIRUS

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Introduction

At every historical epoch, daunting issues emanate in Nigeria that require government attention. As issues emanate there is need to tactfully resolve them and public relations becomes handy means of addressing such issues or phenomena. One of the major goals of public relations work is to help establish lines of communication for faithful exchange of ideas and various publics of its immediate constituency, and policies and programs initiated for the country at large (Nnaemeka cited in Igweobi, 2006). Public relations, as two-way system between government and citizens otherwise known as publics, are a management function which encompasses a broad spectrum of activities and purposes. Its management function, therefore, goes beyond program implementation or technician role-playing, but includes carrying out research for proper policy formulation that translates to effective program implementation.

The centrality of public relations in issues or crises management by government and conduct of government business generally rests on the fact that at every moment there is need for mutual understanding that avoids friction and disharmony especially during moments of uncertainties. Even when

normalcy is the order of the day, government is duty-bound not to disregard public relations strategies. Government utilizes public relations to maintain the existing cordial relationship, improve on trust and confidence, and enhance better understanding of citizens about what it does or intends to do.

An aspect of government public relations activities is strategic information management. Information management cuts across all government activities including policies and planned programs essential to satisfy the yearnings of citizens. Success of government public relations depends on the value of the program to citizens, quantum of program, commitment and rapidity of program implementation as well as degree of transparency of the activity.

In Nigeria, in relation to the organizational frameworks of government, the Presidency is at the apex of government departments at the federal level, the Governor's Office is the apex of government departments at the state level while the Chairman's Office is the apex of government departments at the local government level (Adegoke, 2009). Thus, at the federal government level this study is situated, the entire country is jurisdiction of the federal government and so its public relations activities cover the whole country. Hence, the Federal Ministry of Information and related agencies are responsible for federal government public relations requirements. The Ministry and agencies relate with citizens through mass media and other platforms.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in December 2019, Nigeria recorded an index case on 27th February, 2020 through an Italian immigrant. From that time there has been meteoric rise in the rate of infections and deaths in the country. As at 6th June, 2020, reported number of infections and deaths has been put at 11,844 and 333 respectively with 3,696 persons infected were discharged (NCDC cited in TVC News, 2020) across the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, Abuja. Despite the novelty of the corona virus, literature shows that Nigeria and the global community at large have, at one point or the other experienced some infectious diseases at different historical milieu. Previous experience with Ebola virus, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and H₁N₁pandemic09 influenza just to mention a few were some of the epidemic that emerged with devastating effect and required proper management (Lipsitch, Swerdlow & Finelli, 2020). This reveals that as epidemic evolves, there is an urgent need to manage it and public relations is germane in this respect. Thus, the Corona virus which has raised health concerns with economic, social, and political implications is being briskly managed through the Federal government public relations using deferent strategies and tactics.

Statement of the Problem

Public relations have generated interest in academic scholarship in varying respects. However, even studies on relationship between government and public relationship deal mainly with the status of government public relations and its institutionalization in governance (see Pricewell & Vincent, 2013), national security and security agencies (see Oluwasola, 2016), political culture and economic development (see Asemah, 2011). Other studies border on health-related issues with varying methods and settings (see AbdurAzeez, 2020). A scan at literature reveals that these studies are essentially either qualitative or quantitative in nature. Similarly, most of the studies do not explore the two-way symmetric model as a theoretical base for the studies in relation to the novel COVID-19 pandemic. This creates a research gap particularly in the use of two-way symmetrical model and relationship between the Federal Government of Nigeria and public relations that need to be filled. Premised on this research inadequacy, the study was undertaken to fill the existing research gap.

To achieve this, the study relied on three objectives which are to: (i) explain the necessity of using public relations by the Federal Government of Nigeria to contain the COVID-19 pandemic; (ii) understand the public relations strategies and tactics the Federal Government of Nigeria used to contain COVID-19; and (iii) explain how Federal Government of Nigeria used public relations strategies and tactics to contain COVID-19. In order to address these concerns, the researchers logically segment the study as evidenced in the literature review. These segments include conceptual clarifications that embody the functions or roles emblematic of the necessity of government public relations, Nigeria government public relations strategies and tactics (that grafts how Federal Government of Nigeria uses public relations strategies and tactics to contain COVID-19). Other segments include factors militating against the effectiveness of the strategies and tactics, and finally, suggested ways of improving on the effectiveness of the strategies and tactics. Preceding these significant junctures articulated in the literature review is a careful examination of two-way symmetrical model that fulcrums the study.

The main contribution of this study is to expand the perimeters of academic literature in the study of government public relations with close reference to COVID-19 that is ravaging Nigeria in particular and the world at large. It will also help the Federal Government of Nigeria and its agencies to rejig their public relations strategies and tactics with close attention to deficient

approach, policy and program implementation for maximum result. Finally, it will clear doubts of skeptics who consider the virus unreal and at the same time reinforce the belief of citizens, who are doubtless of its reality and observe protocols of the pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on one of the most dominant perspectives in public relations; the two-way symmetrical model which is one of the four public relations models developed by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt in 1984. The other three being press agentry, public information, and two-way asymmetrical models. Grunig and Hunt (1984), while advancing the basic assumption of the model aver that the symmetrical model proposes that individuals, organizations, institutions, and publics should use communication to adjust their ideas and behaviors to those of others that try to control how others think and behave (cited in Chile & Tsafa, 2016). This amplifies the notion that two-way symmetrical model rests on its democratic principle that encourages dialogue between two parties with the aim of achieving mutual understanding between the parties involved in an issue. The two-way symmetrical model is scientific in nature.

Providing perspective on the scientific nature of two-way symmetrical model, Beverley (2013) explains that the model uses research to discover the expectations of the public, solicits their feedback, and uses the feedback to satisfy the requirements of the public in an effective and efficient manner. Beverley's exposition underscores the essence of research which is fact-finding consciously and systemically carried out to surmount a problem. On account that the two-way communication models utilizes feedback from respondents, Ukwela (2016) notes that there will be two-way balanced effects whereby both the communicator of the message and the receiver will end up in positive position. Thus, if the two parties are involved in open communication and build trust through the two-way symmetrical model, they are more likely to be in a positive position when crisis erupts because of the pre-existing strong relationship that results to enviable reputation. As Dlamini (2016) affirms, the model is about mutuality and symbiotic relationship between parties targeted towards achieving a common objective. In furtherance of the workability of the model, Dlamini (2016) elaborates that two-way symmetrical theory builds trust, confidence, respect, transparency, credibility, accountability, and

long-term rapport among the parties involved. This differentiates it from the stereotypical stance of other three models as manipulative and lack balanced interactivity and cordiality. In the case of two-way symmetrical model, messages are sent and high premium is placed on feedback which is used to solve individual and societal problem. Grunig and Grunig (2008) assert that two-way symmetrical model involves communication that is ethically carried out and as a result, introduces effects that balance the interests of organizations or institutions and the publics in society.

Despite the effectiveness of two-way symmetrical model, Bi (2014) views it with ambivalence. To Bi, the model is utopian and unworkable in a real world situations and circumstances. The implication being that it is unrealistic and can be better construed as mere academic imagination for the purported balance to be achieved. This implicitly undresses practical experience which shows that there is always intrigues and interplay of power between two parties each striving to outsmart the other making the supposedly balance become lopsided.

Notwithstanding the criticism, one is inclined to concede that to the extent that two-way symmetrical model of public relations is a dialogic enterprise as it encourages two parties (Federal Government of Nigeria and citizens/residents in this context) to dialogue, public relations creates transparency, understanding, trust, confidence, cordiality, and acceptability. It represents the current situation whereby the Nigerian Federal government deploys all public relations strategies and tactics including sorts of media and other platforms to dialogue with the public or citizens in her quest to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This is why two-way symmetrical model is considered applicable to this study.

Conceptualizing Public Relations

Definitions of the concept “public relations” abound. Most of these definitions which are revealing and incisive are largely common in substance despite elements of dissimilarities depending on contexts that inform the definitions. For the purpose of brevity and in order not to bore readers with the multitude of definitions, the study settles on the World Assembly of Public Relations’ definition of public relations popularly known as the 1978 Mexican Statement. We are relying on this definition because it appears to be a template for other definitions of public relations and more fundamentally, most suitable for this study.

The Mexican Statement defines public relations as the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders, and implementing planned programs of action which serves both the organization and publics. With the help of professionals an individual, organization, or government uses purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationship and reputation with its publics to help support and achieve its goals. Implicitly, the practice of public relations involves management function that denotes a departure from its historical roots in publicity to become a research based strategy. Therefore, two perspectives underlie public relations. It can be construed either in an instrumental perspective as a tool to increase the efficiency of communication for organizations and institutions, or it can also be understood as a strategic management function and relationships builder (Cutlip, Centre & Dozier 2005 cited in Yang & Veil, 2015). A hybrid of these perspectives when translated to reality brings out the overall value of public relations which revolves around information and relationship management with the ultimate aim of creating understanding that is beneficial to both organization or institution and its publics.

A Focus on Government Public Relations

Government public relations refers to a philosophy and function of government which is aimed at evaluating public attitudes, identifying the policies, programs, actions and procedures of government with public interest and carrying out genuine program of actions and effective communication to win and sustain public understanding and acceptance (Princewell & Vincent, 2013). This entails the effective application of public relations principles, strategies and tactics by government at all levels. The objective is to inform citizens of its policies, issues and events with a view to building mutual understanding, respect and trust with the publics. Grunig and Grunig (2008) argue favorably in this direction that government public relations focus on the use of public relations strategies and tactics by public institutions in order to advance their mission and achieve goals. This can only be possible by providing public knowledge. Ones there is absence of public knowledge and understanding, endorsement, goodwill, programs and activities of government become elusive (Princewell & Vincent, 2013). The application of public relations by Nigerian government has been in transit since the

inception of public relations in the early 1940s. The institutionalization of public relations in government over the years has impacted meaningfully on the socio-economic and political life of citizens.

Essentially, government public relations practice focuses on two main tasks. The first is provision of regular information on policies, plans and achievements of government. The second task is educating the public on matters that affect the well-being of members of the society. Through regular information and education, the government creates awareness about what it is doing and what it intends to do, how things are done and will be done because citizens expect transparency and accountability of resources. This is probably why Anchor cited in Princewell and Vincent (2013) opines that institutionalized public relations provide accurate, full and timely information about government policies, activities, and programs to the public.

At this auspicious moment of the global health challenge, government public relations ensures that citizens are abreast with the trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic thereby demanding obligation from the citizens on how to contain the pandemic. The Federal Government demands obedience, loyalty, critical thinking, perseverance, discipline, modesty and magnanimity in accepting protocols aimed at containing the Corona virus. Therefore, through regular channels of communication citizens are sufficiently enlightened to make informed decisions about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perspectives on COVID-19

The COVID-19 also known as Corona virus is an infectious disease which origin is traced to Wuhan, China. Despite the fact that the outbreak of the novel pandemic which has encased the whole world was first noticeable in December 2019, it was until on 27th February, 2020 that the virus registered its presence in Nigeria through an Italian immigrant. Even as he survived the virus, transmission had already taken place through physical human contacts. The COVID-19 being a contagious virus is transmitted primarily through droplets contacts from sneezing, coughing, shaking of hands and touching contaminated surfaces when one contacts and touches one's eyes, nose or mouth.

The WHO (2020) reports that the COVID-19 virus infects people of all ages. However, evidence to date suggests that two groups of people are at a higher risk of getting severe COVID-19 virus. These are people over 60 years old and those with underlying medical conditions such as cardiovascular

disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer. The WHO (2020) cautions that adults in the age range from around 40 years where risk of severe disease gradually increases to 60 years should protect themselves and in turn protect others that may be more vulnerable.

Establishing the vulnerability of Nigerians to the virus, Ibrahim and Olasinde (2020) reveal that Nigeria having a very low score of 0.27 out of a maximum of 1.0 in the Infectious Disease Vulnerability Index ranking, a poorly managed outbreak may worsen the global pandemic. The inevitability for the virus to spread exponentially is associated with the population size. With an estimated population of 200 million people in Nigeria, the need arises for proactive steps to mitigate the menace otherwise it may be worse not only in Nigeria but among the countries of the world (Moore, Gelfeld, Okunogbe & Paul, 2019).

Following the index case and subsequent spread that ensued, the immediate action of the Nigeria Federal Government was to conscientize citizenry on the emergence of the virus, advocate social distancing and self-isolation which presuppose that people have enough space that do not put them at risk of being infected. Other measures include use of sanitizers, use of face mask, closure of schools of learning, and reducing number of individuals to a maximum of 20 persons at different gatherings including places of worship, asking civil servants on levels lower than level 12 to stay at home. Even as Ogunde (2020) points a gloomy picture about acute water shortage in Nigeria that in Lagos, for example, where we have over 100 slum areas, about 80 people could be found sharing a 10-room building with only two toilets and a bathroom being shared by all with no pipe-borne or treated water readily available, government advised for regular washing of hands with soap and water.

In the midst of this, the Federal Government went on to evolve prevention and management architecture championed by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC and the Presidential Task Force, PTF. These measures were to prepare for the potential calamity that would befall Nigeria. Ogunde (2020) expresses fears in this regard that it would be hell if the COVID-19 broke out in Nigeria on the scale presently being witnessed in Europe and USA. A disturbing dimension about the speedy transmission of COVID-19 is community transmission in the country. In spite of government's lockdown, people freely travel and mingle in the community settings and this worsens the spread of the virus into different states. This calls for expansion of the health system as AbdulAzeez (2020) remarks, the Federal Government of Nigeria considered building or encouraged building of more isolation centers across

the different states in the country as exemplified by the Chinese government in Wuhan as a viable option to fast track testing and management of infected cases.

However, looking at the trajectory of the virus, the rate of infections and deaths is steadily on the increase. This is evidenced in the daily Media Briefing of the Presidential Task Force. From an inconsequential February 27, 2020 index case and a death that ensued, the figures have escalated to 11,844 confirmed cases and 333 deaths as at 6th June, 2020 (TVC News, Saturday, June 6, 2020).

Government Public Relations Strategies

The Nigeria Federal Government is saddled with the responsibility of certain things including but not limited to providing sustainable educational system, durable physical infrastructure like roads and rail systems, and good health system. Provision of these infrastructure and facilities creates confidence and support to government. But the problems and pressures of society increasingly overstretch resources, capacity and machinery of government thereby necessitating government's deployment of public relations to provide full information and enlightenment about its efforts. As Black 1976 cited in Omondi (2012) explains, the purpose of public relations practice generally is to establish a two-way communication mechanism to resolve conflict of interests by seeking common ground or areas of mutual interest, and to establish understanding based on truth, knowledge and full information. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Federal government of Nigeria, through its agencies applied public relations strategies and tools to curtail the rate of infections, deaths and even those discharged. The following are public relations strategies and tactics Federal Government of Nigeria adopted to educate, create awareness and enlighten the citizenry have contributed to ameliorate dangers of the pandemic.

- a. **Mass Media:** The Nigerian Government used the conventional mass media like radio, television, newspapers, billboards, and handbills in the discharge of public relations campaigns towards the achievement of mutual relationship, understanding and acceptance of COVID-19 policies and programs. These media are veritable public relations tools for attitudinal and behavioral change towards adopting acceptable

practices and behavior. The education, awareness and enlightenment they create contribute to assuage dangers on the pandemic (Olayiwola 2014 cited in Nmere, Okolo, Abugu, Alio & Aneto, 2020). Suffice it to note that, on daily basis the Presidential Task Force, PTF on COVID-19 engages citizens on a platform known as Media Briefing. The one-hour briefing which takes place between 5:00pm and 6:00pm is featured on Channels television, TVC News and Nigerian Television Authority, all with international reach to intimate citizens on daily routines of the Presidential Task Force and on different dimensions about the pandemic. Journalists that normally cover the briefing amplify concerns raised in their respective media outlets, both broadcast and print. The regular use of media briefing is consistent with the step taken by the World Health Organization (2020) aimed at routinely assessing the outbreak to keep track with deep concerns about the alarming level of the spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction.

Apart from the sustained efforts of PTF is the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC which is a federal agency at the forefront of health-related issues. The NCDC is directly responsible for testing of COVID-19 so as to determine the virus status of those potentially exposed to it. This agency also makes use of the mass media to disseminate information specifically on protocols to mitigate the spread of the virus. The Federal Ministry of Health through NCDC activates a national Emergency Operations Centre, EOC which mandate is to spearhead the national public health responses to the COVID-19 outbreak. All these efforts and corresponding impact would remain unknown without mass media use by these stakeholders.

- b. **Billboards and Handbills:** Billboards is a form of advertisement that presents an appeal for the brands, products, services or issues which could be used to gain more market share or patronage. It develops clear branding through large text sizes, pictures and products, clearly explained features and benefits and other relevant information (Van Meurs & Aristoff, 2009). Billboards are mounted at strategic places to attract public attention. Due to their informative and educative nature, the Federal Government through its agencies resorted to their massive use to disseminate messages about the COVID-19 pandemic. Handbills on the other hand are small printed materials usually one page or leaflet for wide distribution normally by hand. Like billboards, handbills also provide a wide range of information about product, service or an issue.

It serves as good platform for the Federal Government of Nigeria to provide information about the pandemic ranging from COVID-19 update to COVID-19 prevention measures. An example is “LET’S FIGHT COVID-19, NOT PEOPLE”.

- c. **Social Media:** The advent of social media has expanded the channels government utilizes to keep society informed on socio-economic and political developments. In view of the new media age which makes social media use imperative, Nigeria Federal Government and its agencies own websites that are accessible to citizenry for inquiry as well as to keep pace with the trajectory of steps government takes to contain the pandemic. For example, <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng> and <https://ncdc.gov.ng> are the websites the Presidential Task Force and Nigeria Centre for Disease Control operate respectively. These agencies also make use of social media platforms like Twitter (@NCDCGov), Facebook (@NCDCGov), Telegram (time/NCDCgov[Telegram]), and YouTube. The platforms avail the Presidential Task Force and Federal government agencies the opportunity to feature reviews of national activities and more preventive measures instituted to ease the spread of the virus. Through its hash-tag (#TakeResponsibility) campaign, NCDC is able to mobilize Nigerians and residents in the country to proactively take greater individual and collective responsibility in preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19 in the country.
- d. **Palliative Measures:** This refers to ways the Federal Government of Nigeria uses to provide relief materials to citizens particularly the less privileged burdened with poverty. A grave consequence of COVID-19 was the lockdown imposition on non-essential activities first declared to take effect in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Lagos and Ogun States on 30th March, 2020. This was to reduce the transmission of the virus across the country. Similarly, State governments locked down their states subsequently. Even before the lockdown, the Federal Government of Nigeria had issued a ban on all international flights, except for emergency and essential flights with effect from 23rd March, 2020.

Expectedly, the lockdown adversely affected especially those at the low echelon of society whose source of existence could only be guaranteed by engaging in daily menial jobs as the door to their only means of survival was shut. In order to alleviate extreme suffering of this category of citizens whose economic condition was exacerbated by

the COVID-19 outbreak, Government had to provide relief materials and financial resources. The Federal Government through the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Sadiq Farouq attested to this that food ration would be distributed to vulnerable households; on 1st April, 2020 the Ministry began payment of #20,000 to families registered in the National Social Registry (Nwagbara, 2020). The government also introduced a #50bn stimulus package (credit facility, not grant) through the Central Bank of Nigeria to help households and small businesses hardest hit by the adverse impact of the coronavirus (Ayeni, 2020). These measures were meant not to simply alleviate the sufferings of those at the fringe of poverty, but also to douse tension, create confidence in government, build mutual understanding and motivate citizens to cooperate with the Federal Government of Nigeria in its fight against the Coronavirus.

Challenges

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the Federal Government appeared to be proactive by putting preventive and curative mechanisms in place to contain the virus. Typically, the federal government employed public relations strategies and tactics to ameliorate the scourge of the virus. However, these techniques could not yield optimal results as they were thwarted by the following factors. The level of illiteracy and ignorance among Nigerians undermined Nigeria Federal Government's public relations efforts to contain the menace of COVID-19. Despite sustained efforts to inform and conscientize the citizenry, skeptics did not believe in the reality of the virus. While even the supposedly educated persons linked the virus to ailment for the rich, others did not simply believe of its existence. As a matter of fact, both some educated and uneducated people subscribed to one of the conspiracy theories; the economic perspective that the pandemic was a hoax triggered and promoted by the advanced countries to boost sales of vaccines for an imaginary virus. This problem was compounded by limited access and reach of the mass media particularly to rural residents. Similarly, social media messages were beyond comprehension of the uneducated as such messages were predominantly presented in English language. Consequently, they risked their lives as they flouted government directives on social distancing, lockdown, regular washing of hands with soap and water just to mention a few.

The level of poverty constituted another challenge to the success of government's use of public relations tools and strategies. In Nigeria, many average citizens live at the margin of poverty. Their means of livelihood is dependent on what they get from daily menial jobs. If this category of people could not measure up during normal periods, the COVID-19 outbreak aggravated their vulnerability and economic woes. Thus, much as the government embarked on intensive advocacy to inform and create general awareness about the ills of the virus for the citizenry to be weary of it, success appeared suboptimal.

The discriminatory nature by which the palliative materials were distributed could not achieve the expected outcome. Attention was focused on the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja at the expense of the 36 states of the federation that make up the bulk of the country. The implication is that the greatest percentage of economically vulnerable Nigerians the policy was designed to cushion the effect of poverty was more theoretical than in reality. This explains why citizens protested to and continued to carry out certain activities at the slightest given opportunity to earn a living.

Another factor is the delay in the closure of Nigeria's border till 23rd March, 2020, three weeks after the recorded index case of an Italian immigrant and inter-city movement despite continuous increase in the number of imported COVID-19 pandemic cases and community transmission in Nigeria (AbdulAzeez, 2020). The delay provided a window for the spread of the infection at two fronts. First, the delay in border closure made it possible for potential vectors to fly into the country with the virus. Second, the delay in inter-state movement prohibition encouraged possibility of spread of the virus within Nigeria. This development went a long way to undermine effectiveness of the Federal government public relations effort in combatting the pandemic.

The Way Forward

In view of the above factors that conspire to undermine the effectiveness of Nigeria government public relations to flatten the Corona virus curve, the following recommendations are hereby made with the expectation that, if followed will go a long way in containing the pandemic. The Nigerian Federal Government should not relent in her use of public relations in the fight against COVID-19 bearing in mind that public relations is a process that is a

continually and systematically planned, not only before a campaign but also during and after the campaign. With sustained efforts, even the skeptics would likely have a rethink about the reality of the virus and the need to comply with COVID-19 protocol.

Government should aggressively make use of interpersonal communication, which appeared to be elusive in its public relations scheme, by setting and integrating community corps marshals, traditional institutions, opinion leaders, in its advocacy architecture. In addition, National Orientation Agency, NOA which has been silent since the emergence of COVID-19 in Nigeria should embark on robust advocacy. This will facilitate and intensify advocacy or penetration of messages about COVID-19 virus particularly in rural settings where there is limited mass media reach. This recommendation is premised on the limited effect of reliance on the conventional mass media and social media.

On account of disenchantments in some quarters about the discriminatory distributive style of palliative materials, it is suggested that the palliatives should not be limited to certain parts of the country bearing in mind that majority of similar category of potential beneficiaries weighed down by the burden of the COVID-19 virus exist in other parts of the country. Reaching out to them will motivate them to cooperate with the Federal Government to succeed in addressing the pandemic.

It is also recommended that despite the delay in border closure that exacerbated the transmission of the virus, re-opening of border, relaxation of lockdown and lifting of ban on movement of non-essential materials and people should be based on convincing scientific data about the trend on the virus and not simplistically on the whims and caprice of officialdom. This is crucial especially as community transmission has become a strong factor in the escalation of the transmission and death toll.

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