

IMPACT OF EBOLA PANDEMIC ON THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF WEST AFRICA, 1976 – 2016

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) which was said to have first appeared in 1976 in two simultaneous outbreaks, one in what is now Nzara, South Sudan, and the other in Yambuku in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)). The latter occurred in a village near the Ebola River, from which the disease derives its name. Between 1976 and 2012, the disease was said to have killed about 1,600 people. However, the latest Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa began in December 2013 and was contained in 2016. It was recorded to have infected about 28,652 people, and killed more than 11,325 people. The 17,000 Ebola survivors were said to have been facing health problems ranging from possible blindness, joint pains, headache as well as psycho-social challenges including rejection, stigmatization by friends and families, and depression etc. The spread and persistence of EVD epidemic in West Africa for nearly 3 years could be attributed to poor health care systems in the worst-hit countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. These countries lacked the capacity in terms of health care infrastructure as well as equipment and medical personnel to contain the ravaging Ebola pandemic. Liberia, for instance, had only 50-60 medical doctors for its four million people at the onset of the EVD. Besides, the international response to the deadly Ebola epidemic came very slowly, that is, about 8-9 months after the outbreak of the epidemic. Moreover, there was no vaccine readily available for combating the scourge. However, the global community, including the United States, United Nations, World Health Organization, European Union, United Kingdom, Japan and Cuba etc eventually provided funds, equipment as well as medical expertise and troops that ultimately helped to contain the deadly epidemic. This paper finally examines the impact of the Ebola virus epidemic on the social and economic development of West Africa. It established that the Ebola pandemic led to the disorganization of social life, the monumental loss of human lives and the disruption of social relations in the affected countries. It also resulted in the decline of economic productivity, reduction in international trade in the West African sub- region, which consequently increased the rate of inflation, and induced exchange volatility and pervasive poverty in the affected countries.