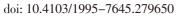


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Public health preparedness towards COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria

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The 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), formerly called novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), was discovered in December 2019. This outbreak was declared a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) on 30th January 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO announced US\$ 675 million fund to strengthen China and nations with weaker health systems in combating COVID-19. By 18th February 2020, there has been 73 332 confirmed cases with one case in Egypt[1].

Due to its cosmopolitan nature, Nigeria is prone to COVID-19 outbreak if stringent public health measures are not put in place. In July 2014, a Liberian diplomat who had Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) entered the country through the Murtala Mohammed Airport, Lagos[2]. Subsequently, 19 laboratory confirmed cases of EVD were identified with 42.1% fatality rate, which contributed to declaring EVD as PHEIC by the WHO[2]. These emphasize the need to have well equipped diagnostic laboratories, trained diagnosticians and public health measures to forestall the occurrence of COVID-19 epidemic in Nigeria.

According to the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the National Reference Laboratory, Abuja, Northcentral Nigeria appeared to be equipped with technical and human resources required to diagnose COVID-19[3]. Unconfirmed reports also have it that Irrua Specialist Hospital (ISTH), South-south Nigeria, and Central Research Laboratory, Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Southwest Nigeria have the capacity to diagnose COVID-19. During the 2014 EVD outbreak, LUTH was used for the preliminary investigation of EVD before confirmatory diagnosis was made by a WHO collaborating centre in Dakar, Senegal[2]. The NCDC, which is the nations' public health institute, has also put in place some public health measures against COVID-19 through its website (www.ncdc.gov.ng) and *via* Twitter handle @NCDCgov to ensure the general public stay updated about the recent global epidemic prevention and management strategies against COVID-19. The NCDC has developed the Surveillance and Outbreak Response Management System (SORMAS) for case-based reporting for epidemic prone diseases in 11 states of the federation, 'SitAware' and 'Tatafo' for event-based surveillance and incident management among NCDC staff members, and Mobile Strengthening Epidemic Response Systems (mSers) for aggregate reporting[4]. The establishment of National Incident Coordination Centre (ICC) for outbreak preparedness and response activities enables NCDC to gather intelligence reports daily, identify impending public health threats and ensure that outbreak responses are well coordinated and controlled[5].

Through partnership with various national, regional and international organizations, NCDC has been able to strengthen its preparedness through donor funding for upgrading of its selected laboratory networks and staff capacity development for outbreak preparedness and responses^[5]. In addition, building on the successes recorded by Nigeria in the fight against the 2014 EVD outbreak, recent Lassa fever and Monkeypox virus outbreaks, it is believed that Nigeria will be able to manage viral outbreaks. With the restructuring that has happened at the NCDC, it is believe that Nigeria will be able to curtail the spread of COVID-19 if the virus eventually finds its way into the country.

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

MJO conceptualized and designed the study. MJO also drafted the first manuscript. AKA designed and reviewed the final manuscript for intellectual content. INA participated in the study, designed and reviewed the final manuscript for intellectual content. All authors are responsible for the integrity of the data.

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