

Media Stakeholders Decry Increasing Maltreatment of Journalists, Appraise Govt Bail Out



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As the COVID-19 pandemic bites harder on the media industry, stakeholders have called for measures to ensure the safety and well-being of journalists and the media across Nigeria.

Maltreatment of journalists takes different forms, from physical to mental assault. But by far more harmful is the mental one that comes from wrongful dismissal or lack of wages because it creates anxiety, constant worry leading to lack of focus. As the media bear the brunt of COVID-19, these assaults have increased. Hard pressed government officials, the police, employers and politicians appear to see the media and journalists as the enemy and frequently violate their rights during reportage.

Exemplifying the injurious form of assault on the journalist is the case of Mrs. Vivian Ottih, a senior journalist with the Imo Broadcasting Corporation, IBC, who was suspended indefinitely in May, 2020 for appealing to the state government to pay their outstanding salaries. According to some stakeholders interviewed for this story, the continued maltreatment of journalists in the country is condemnable.

Mr Richard Akinnola, a senior journalist and the Director of Media Law Centre, Professor Abigail Ogwezzy-Ndisika, of the University of Lagos, and Mr Achilleus Chud-Uchegbu, former editor of The UNION newspaper decried the increasing maltreatment of journalists and said it was uncalled for.

Mr. Akinnola also described the Nigeria Union of Journalists, NUJ, a lame organization for failing to come to Ottih's assistance at her hour of need.

On Ottih, he said: "It was a bit high-handed and uncalled for. As a management, if you owe and the staff calls for it, you respond to the issues raised. The management even sacked a security man that let her in to the station's premises when she went to see the Acting General Manager that invited her. The suspension was unwarranted and even the sacking of the security man. In all these, I can say that the NUJ is impotent, that is why you see some media NGOs taking over the fight for the rights of journalists.

Continuing, he said, "The South East chairperson of National Association of Women Journalists, NAWOJ, issued a strong statement condemning the suspension, but the national NAWOJ dissociated itself from the statement. The internal politics of NUJ and NAWOJ came into play. That is why I said the NUJ is impotent and NAWOJ is an arm of the NUJ."

Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Chud-Uchegbu agreed with Akinnola.

Ogwezzy-Ndisika described Ottih's continued suspension as an unfortunate incident, but said, " It did not start now. The problem is that in this profession we fight for others without fighting for ourselves. It is not enough to talk about democracy, return Nigeria to democracy, issues in election and voting. The media is a critical variable in democratic governance. The media fought for the current democracy, which brought these same people to power, but when they come to power, the media is the institution they first want to hack down."

Uchegbu-Chud said: "She is entitled to her pay. To that extent, it was wrong to have suspended that worker for demanding her wages. If the issue was about non-availability of resources to offset the wage bill, the authorities ought to have found a better way to engage and dialogue with the workers and find a middle ground to address the issue."

In addition to advocacy by media NGOs, Ogwezzy-Ndisika suggested a form of synergy across board among journalists, or else, "Media managers and owners would not take journalists serious."

Describing the pre-COVID-19 era as stressful for the media considering the fall in advert remuneration and increasing cost of media operations, particularly in the area of equipment that are mostly sourced from abroad at high cost and poor electricity supply, which forces media houses to depend on generators, these stakeholders added that the disruptive impact of Corona Virus pandemic on the economy has compounded the woes of media.

On bailout for the Media

Despite the downsizing, forced leave, cut in pay and uncertainty over staff salaries over which many media houses had defaulted in the pre-COVID-19 era, Mr Akinnola said he does not support the idea of the media seeking bailout from the government as this could undermine their watchdog role.

He said: "Under section 22 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the media are supposed to hold the government accountable, if you now go and ask for bail-out, how do you hold the government accountable?"

"Rather, what you should we should ask for is concessionary packages on imported materials, components for printing. I expect the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria, NPAN, and NUJ to tell the government to remove VAT and import duty from newsprint so that they can survive."

For Ogwezzy-Ndisika, "It is a kind of gratis. When we look at the contest in which the media operate, it is general and every other profession and organisations are affected, so giving palliative to the media is not enough to compromise our ethics. I don't think government support, which is a one-off thing, is bad. But I would rather we hold a strategic meeting among stakeholders on the way forward. We should begin to look at Insurance, for instance and other ways at strengthening the media.

"They should also consider a model like Pay TV so that when there is distress, there is a pool of resources to cushion the effect. On the national level, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs Disaster Management and Social Development could be made to handle such things in the future with a data base of everyone whereby it is made Constitutional and the National Assembly authorizes the release of funds for any distressed organization in the country. In that way, any form of assistance to any organization would be regarded as legal and uncompromising.

For Chud-Uchegbu, a good business model would keep the media in business all year round.

"Government does not need to bail out media houses on the ground that media is business. The media in Nigeria is seen as social or charitable service to society. Let me ask: who buys the media if not only advertisers who need media space.? So, how many media organisations issue receipts and charge for self-promoting interviews, features, special reports and other such apart from news?"

"How many media organisations charge other business entities for press releases issued to them? How many media houses charged fixed rates for pictures of AGMs of companies and other businesses event meant to advertise products or even special events? We don't.

"We publish those as social service to society. What it means is that we gloss over money-making avenues and think that the few adverts we take can offset the daily running cost of a media house."

No, we haven't yet started. We cannot be running our media as charity and be expecting government to bail us out.

Protection of Journalists on the Frontline

On the issue of safety of journalists on the frontline, Mr Akinnola noted that there is enough legislation to protect journalists in Nigeria from assault, but expressed worry that journalists lack the consciousness and knowledge of the relevant laws. He said, "The consciousness is not there. How many of the journalists know the section of the Constitution that talks about freedom of expression? he asked quizzically. "And when you want to organize programmes to empower them, only a very few are interested."

Chud-Uchegbu said; "To resolve this issue, I believe that we must elevate journalism practice in Nigeria by creating minimum professional entry qualifications and wage brackets as well as upgrades and promotions based on professional examination attainments.

"These can be achieved through a Chartered Journalism Institute from where new standards will be set for employers of professional journalists".

Nigeria Union of Journalists Refutes LGA Claims, Demands Apology

The Rivers State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists has refuted recent claims made by the chairman of Ikwerre Local Government Area, Mr. Samuel Nwanosike that some persons under the guise of the union are spreading fake rumors about the council and security situations in the Area.

The council chairman, through its media officer, Mr. Chris Omodu, in a press release, alleged that some criminals use the platform of the NUJ to sabotage government's efforts at fighting, disseminating fake news about the Chief Security officer, CSO of the LGA, Mr. Samuel Oboni who they alleged was using local Vigilante group to arrest and intimidate innocent citizens of the Area.

In a reaction, the Secretary Nigeria Union of Journalists Rivers State Council, Mr. Ike Wigodo describe the statement credited to Mr. Omodu as reckless, frivolous, unverifiable and totally untrue, adding that the statement negates what the Union represents.

Mr. Wigodo frowned at the statement and demands an unreserved apology from Ikwerre Local Government Area.

The NUJ statement reads in part, "The Rivers State Council of NUJ also wishes to inform the author of the reckless statement that it runs no newspaper, radio or TV stations of its own in the State and therefore can not take responsibility for what goes on in various media outlets, let alone on social media.

"It is very unfortunate that a media officer as Mr Omodu claims to be, could not tell the difference between the NUJ and media organisations, or between NUJ platform and the social media."

Security Officials Attached To Kogi Governor Assault Journalist In Ondo During APC Primary Election

A journalist with The Nation newspaper, Mr Friday Osagie Otabor, was on Monday assaulted by security officials attached to Kogi State governor, Yahaya Bello, at the venue of the governorship primary election of the All Progressives Congress in Ondo State.

Otabor, who was attacked at the International Culture and Event Centre in Akure, the state capital, where the exercise took place, attempted to interview Governor Bello when the security personnel descended on him.

The journalist disclosed that he was harassed and beaten to stupor by the security men despite identifying himself as a journalist.

He said, "I was only trying to go inside the venue where the APC primary election was taking place but to my surprise the security men at the entrance began to harass me.

"I introduced myself as a journalist but they wouldn't listen to me and before I knew it they

began to beat me.

"I was thrown up and slammed on the concrete floor by the officers as if I was a criminal by the officers."

Otabor sustained injuries as a result of the assault.

COVID-19: NOA Partners NUJ To Fight Pandemic

The National Orientation Agency, NOA, has urged the Nigeria Union of Journalists to support the agency on public awareness guidelines against the Corona Virus pandemic.

Mrs. Dolapo Dosunmu, Director, National Orientation Agency (NOA) in Oyo State, called for the partnership during a courtesy visit to the state executive members of the union in Ibadan recently.

She said that partnering with journalists in the state became necessary to intimate residents on reasons why they should adhere strictly to COVID-19 preventive measures.

Dosunmu said that though many people now believed that coronavirus disease existed, some did not abide with preventive guidelines by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC.

The NOA boss noted that commercial taxi/bus drivers, tricycle and Okada operators did not abide by the stipulated guidelines such as wearing of face- mask and number of passengers to be carried.

She called on journalists to promote message of hope about the pandemic to the general public, saying that contracting the disease should not be seen as death sentence.

Dosunmu noted that people should be discouraged from stigmatising COVID-19 patients, noting that the fear of stigmatisation could discourage some from going for treatment.

Mr. Demola Babalola, the state NUJ

Chairman, appreciated the visit and assured the NOA director of effective collaboration so that the public would be fully sensitised about the virus.

Babalola urged the state government to initiate an executive bill on the compulsory use of facemask across the state. He added that arrest and prosecution of erring public would reduce the spread of the virus and generate more revenue into the purse of the state government through payment of fines.

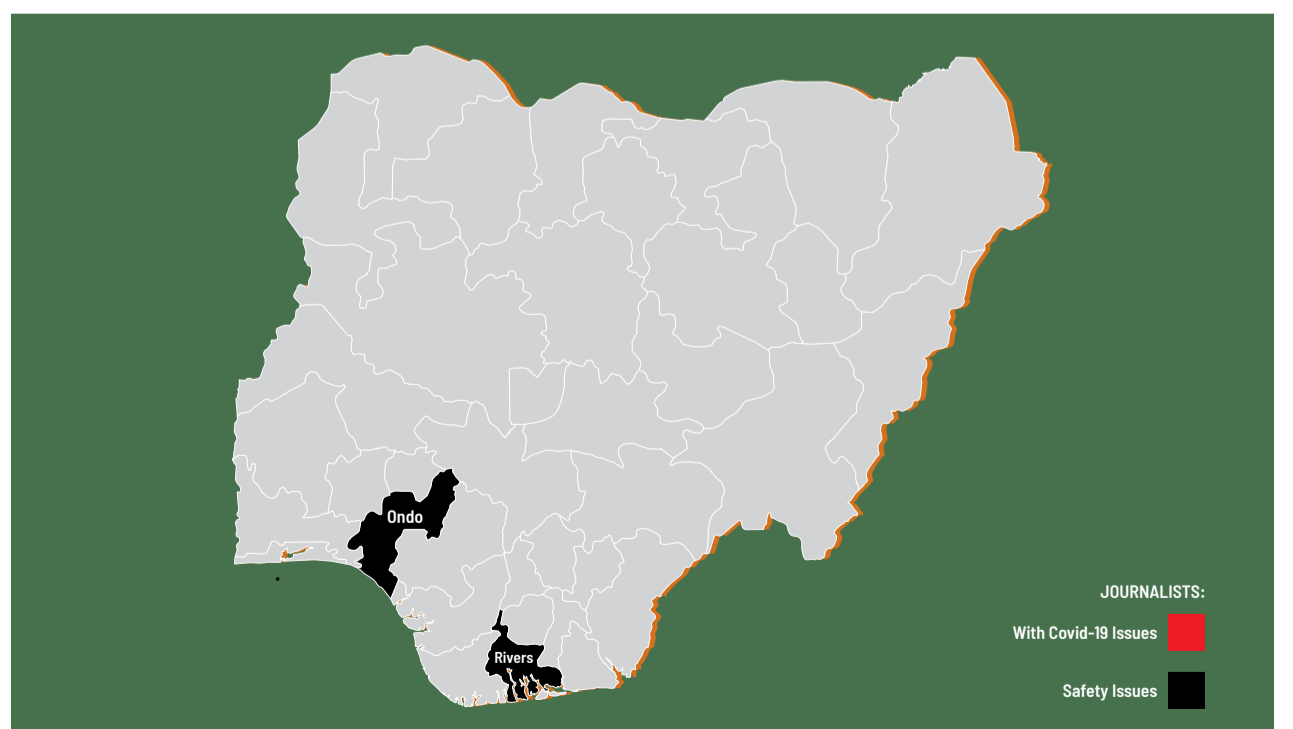
Prominent Nigerians Mourn Media Mogul Funtua

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo, Senate President, Ahmad Lawan, Northern Governors Forum, All Progressives Congress National Leader, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, Nigeria Guild of Editors, NGE, the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, Nigeria Governors Forum, and other eminent Nigerians, have continued to mourn newspaper patron, elder statement and influential media leader, Mallam Ismaila Isa Funtua. Mallam Funtua, who died on Monday at 78, while undergoing a routine medical check-up.

A one-time Minister of Water Resources under President Shehu Shagari, member of the Committee of the 1994-1995 Constitutional Conference, Funtua was until his death, life patron of the International Press Institute, IPI, and the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria, NPAN.

He was a long-time friend, associate and in-law of President Muhammadu Buhari, he served as a strong buttress of support for the president and for his progressive administration.

The late Funtua was the founder of Bulet International Nigeria Limited, one of the biggest indigenous construction companies in the country which built most of the magnificent public buildings in Abuja. He founded the New Africa Holdings (publishers of the defunct Democrat newspapers). The Nigeria Institute of Journalism building in Victoria Island, Lagos has been named after him.



COVID-19: MultiChoice Nigeria Introduces Auto Renewal for Subscribers



As part of its effort to comply with the health protocols on Corona Virus pandemic, MultiChoice Nigeria has introduced an auto-renewal payment option for its DStv and GOtv customers.

According to the company, all active and inactive customers on both platforms will now be able to pay and renew their subscriptions automatically by downloading either MyDStv or MyGOtv App, and follow the instructions when they log in.

With the auto-renewal option, customers can now avoid the stress of long queues at the payment offices or manually renewing their subscription.

It is also a great way to ensure physical distancing, which is one of MultiChoice Nigeria's top priority. The auto-renewal initiative gives customers the option to be billed automatically monthly, quarterly, or annually for their subscriptions, with the choice to cancel at any time.

Martin Mabutho, Chief Customer Officer, said: "Our customers have spoken, and we have listened. It is our responsibility to ensure that our customers are given the most convenient service.

Also putting into consideration, the health of both our customers and front-facing staff, this will encourage people to make a conscious effort in physical distancing."

"We have created and acquired content to ensure that our customers are sufficiently entertained. And with the return of live sports and the most anticipated show in Africa, Big Brother Naija, this is a great way to ensure that customers don't experience any disruption while watching their favourite shows and never have to miss a thing,"

StarTimes Deepens Pay-As-You-Go Content for Subscribers

Pay-TV, StarTimes which introduced the pay-as-you-go model in 2017, has added two premium sports content and animation content for its customers.

Recently, the Minister of Information and Culture was quoted in the media to have said that the pay-as-you-go model was achievable in Nigeria, not just achievable, a pay TV

provider, StarTimes already offers it.

According to the Public Relations Manager of StarTimes Nigeria, Lazarus Ibeabuchi, the pay-as-you-go billing system is reasonable for people who do not spend reasonable time watching television after subscription.

"Pay-as-you-go, in its simplest definition, means flexibility in the pay-television billing system. Subscribers can choose to pay daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly and enjoy all exciting content on their preferred package/bouquet valid for the period paid for.

"Since 2010 when StarTimes started operation in Nigeria, the company has spared no effort in realising its ambitious mission, to ensure that every African family can access, afford, watch and share the beauty of digital TV.

"Because of StarTimes, the price of Pay-TV has been greatly lowered. So, we are making digital TV affordable for all families.

"For sports lovers, StarTimes offers a broad category of international sports tournaments. From Europa League, Bundesliga, Coppa Italia and Copa Del Rey which are exclusive to StarTimes; StarTimes equally airs FA Cup, The English Football League Championship (EFL), Major League Soccer (MLS), Belgian Pro League, Netherlands Eredivisie; and Basketball tourneys.



Expert Urges Brands To Embrace Digital Marketing to Connect With Audience

A brand communication expert, has highlighted the importance of online market space as a source of sustainable revenue for brands in the country.

Mr. Julius Agenmonmen, Group MD, Brandlife Limited, said brands must embrace digital marketing techniques to connect with their target audience.

He said: "The marketing industry is growing tremendously and over the last decade a lot of progress has been recorded in the Nigerian online market space, which has also become a great avenue for brands to relate directly with their target consumers, receive

feedbacks and build captivating brand experiences."

According to him: "This is a clarion call to companies, both big and small to embrace digital marketing and other online channels. This, no doubt, will help build the right level of awareness for their brands with measurable results."

He further stated that the emergence of social media sites, such as Facebook and Instagram provide a platform to reach out to customers and retain them with unique stories both in pictures and videos, adding that many companies may find it challenging to utilize the platform directly.

“ The marketing industry is growing tremendously and over the last decade a lot of progress has been recorded in the Nigerian online market space, which has also become a great avenue for brands to relate directly with their target consumers, receive feedbacks and build captivating brand experiences. ”

Using his company as an example, he said that Brandlife Limited, a marketing service agency with presence in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Angola, Ghana and Nigeria recently announced the launch of digital marketing subsidiary, Brandlife Digital to maximize its marketing strategy in the online market space.

The agency said it was prompted by the desire to provide digital marketing services and utilise the online platform to increase brand visibility, product awareness as well as build an online community for brands.

To this end, Agenmonmen pointed out that Brandlife Digital was founded to provide such companies with strategic approach that is peculiar to their businesses and help them succeed in this digital space. Our edge lies in a unique combination of world-class digital marketing service and a good understanding of the online space.

"Brandlife digital will discover new ways to help organizations harness the online platform towards actualizing their marketing goals. As a part of the parent company, Brandlife Limited, we also choose to stay true to our mission of delivering experiences that make life easier for our clients and more enjoyable for consumers in Africa," he said.

Pay- As -You- Go subscription: NBC Holds Meeting With Operators



The National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, has heeded calls by Nigerians and legislators for the enforcement of 'Pay as You Go' subscription in the country by holding a meeting with stakeholders to see to its implementation.

Assistant Director of Press, NBC, Mr. Ekanem Antia reportedly said the commission held a meeting with Pay-TV operators on Wednesday, July 15, ordering them to work out modalities on the matter.

He said, "We had a meeting with Pay-TV operators on Wednesday and ordered them to discuss the modalities on achieving the feat, and get back to the commission in one month."

He explained that the process of adjustment or regulations for broadcasting was quite distinct from that of other forms of networking such as telecommunications, as it entails rigorous processes to effect some changes in the industry.

He, however, advised Nigerians to be patient and make options for subscriptions pending when the report of the Pay-TV operators was submitted back to the commission.

He continued: "For now, there isn't any technology available to immediately regulate those operators' services. We can as well find out from other countries being speculated to operate the 'Pay as You Go' system."

He, however, gave the assurance that the operators are making efforts towards the actualisation of the new order, even as he noted that DSTV and other companies have pledged to comply within the given timeframe.

Debt: BON lauds FG over 60% Waiver for broadcast stations

The Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria, BON, has commended the Federal Government for granting 60 per cent waiver to the broadcast stations, to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the industry.

Mrs. Sa'a Ibrahim, the Chairperson of the organisation, made the commendation at a media parley tagged: "Meet the Media," organised by the Kano State chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, NUJ, recently in Kano.

Ibrahim, who is also the Director-General, Kano

State Government-owned media outfit, Abubakar Rimi Television, ARTV, said the pandemic exposed the broadcasting stations to serious operating challenges.

She said: "The Federal Government granted 60 per cent waiver to broadcast stations, the stations are also expected to pay for the remaining 40 per cent."

"BON is not satisfied until the waiver is accomplished by 100 per cent," she said. According to her, the broadcasting industry was operating under difficult condition since the outbreak of the pandemic in the country.

Ibrahim noted that broadcasting stations found it difficult to cope with financial obligations due to the pandemic, which crippled economic activities. She stated that the situation had compelled BON to advocate for a total waiver to the broadcasting organisations.

The chairperson said the gesture was in appreciation of the contributions played by the broadcasting industry in providing employment opportunities to the youths in the country.

Commenting on the campaign against the pandemic, Ibrahim said: "as professionals worth their onions, the press are solidly on ground.

"The journalists risk their lives in gathering and disseminating information during the pandemic.

"Journalists also battle with lack of adequate Personal Protective Equipment, PPE, which make their jobs tedious and risky, in terms of effective service delivery, hence, prone to infection."

Ibrahim further said that her organisation was still waiting for the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation, NBC, to come up with a clear roadmap on the digitalisation of the broadcasting stations.

She noted that the process would fast track digital switch over of the broadcasting stations in the country.

FG Poised To Promote Telecom Operators

The federal government is addressing virtually all the problems being experienced by the Telecom operators such as the right of way fees, multiple taxation, vandalism of telecommunications infrastructure.

Speaking at the training on Digital Skills in News Reportage for ICT Journalists organised by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in Abuja during the week, Minister of Communication and Digital Economy, Dr. Isa Ali Pantami, said, "We want to ensure the protection of local operators and

Policy and Regulation

restructure all departments in the ministry because most of them are now obsolete."

He called on the media to promote multimedia journalism in the country and use video, audio and link inclusion to deliver messages to the audience in an effective manner.

According to him; "Today, journalism is no longer about print media, print media still plays a significant role in our journalism, however, multimedia journalism is taking over the space today. The print media is in a better position to promote multimedia journalism in the country.

"In Nigeria, you are in the forefront to promote multimedia journalism online that is why the print media today still maintains online platforms to compliment one another. Digital Nigeria cannot be achieved without training people that will play major roles in the actualisation of the agenda.

"There cannot be digital economy without digital literacy and skills. The role of the ministry is to provide policy direction while the parastatals have the responsibility to ensure effective implementation of the policies."

Pantami explained that the training is part of the implementation of the digital policy of the government, insisting that it was part of the pyramid number two, which dwells on digital skills.

"If you want to promote digital economy, you must ensure that your citizens have access to broadband Internet service. We want to achieve at least 70 per cent broadband penetration by 2025 in our quest to ensure that 180m Nigerians access broadband services.

"We want to provide conducive environment for new investors to come into the ICT sector in order to create a healthy competition in order to bring down the price of data by 40 percent by 2025.



*Dr. Isa Ali Pantami
Minister of Communication and Digital Economy*

Editor's Note

That the media was under stress before COVID-19 is no longer news. That it continued to work under the disruptive influence of COVID-19 alongside health workers, to report, cover and process information, is also no longer news, however herculean and praiseworthy, the task has been. It is in keeping with the professional calling to keep the people informed always and hold governments accountable to the people that made the media stayed on the frontlines during the pandemic. And would continue to do so after the viral pandemic has blown over.

Yet, with that tenacity to uphold professional ethics has come safety issues and the question of sustainability. Why are journalists in the country been maltreated everywhere they turn? What should be done to ensure they are safe during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? Should the media seek funding from the government in the face of dwindling resources and mounting costs? Would financial support from the government it is supposed to hold accountable to the people not compromise the media?

These questions and many more formed the interview we had with some senior journalists whose responses are found in our opening story.

Their answers, though beneficial, are as divergent as you would expect from professionals who make a worship of freedom of expression.

Just as you would find with another inside story on this matter of freedom of expression, the Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria, BON, has commended the government for granting 60 per cent debt waiver to broadcast stations, to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the industry.

Even so, the BON is even calling for more funding.

The issue of pay-as-you-go for PayTV is still causing row in the broadcast industry weeks after the House of Representative ad-hoc committee mediated in the matter in response to the protest by Nigerians. The management of the National Broadcasting Commission, which attended the sessions with the lawmakers, finally set the machinery in place to realize the ensuing recommendations after holding a meeting with operators to work out the plan to implement the new policy.

COVID-19 figures continue to surge in the country, making it mandatory for everyone to adhere to the prescribed health protocols. Check out the data on it and stay safe.

The Editor
Institute for Media and Society, Nigeria

NCDC Confirmed COVID-19 Cases by State, July 24, 2020

States Affected	No. of Cases (Lab Confirmed)	No. of Cases (on admission)	No. Discharged	No. of Deaths
Lagos	14,177	11,898	2,087	192
FCT	3,437	2,390	1,006	41
Oyo	2,497	1,325	1,148	24
Edo	2,128	696	1,360	72
Rivers	1,600	469	1,081	50
Delta	1,456	782	634	40
Kano	1,452	209	1,190	53
Kaduna	1,299	293	994	12
Ogun	1,241	245	973	23
Ondo	1,030	760	248	22
Plateau	780	331	430	19
Ebonyi	748	148	577	23
Enugu	726	284	425	17
Katsina	723	259	441	23
Kwara	707	489	202	16
Borno	609	52	522	35
Gombe	558	14	521	23
Bauchi	535	14	508	13
Abia	527	132	391	4
Imo	465	348	108	9
Osun	420	215	195	10
Bayelsa	326	79	226	21
Jigawa	322	3	308	11
Benue	294	235	53	6
Nasarawa	292	171	113	8
Akwa Ibom	208	80	121	7
Niger	167	25	133	9
Sokoto	153	0	137	16
Anambra	132	45	75	12
Adamawa	115	21	85	9
Ekiti	91	42	47	2
Kebbi	90	4	79	7
Zamfara	77	1	71	5
Yobe	64	3	53	8
Taraba	54	43	11	0
Cross River	34	30	3	1
Kogi	5	0	3	2


Highlights

- On the 24th of July 2020, 591 new confirmed cases and 12 deaths were recorded in Nigeria.
- No new state has reported a case in the last 24 hours.
- Till date, 39,539 cases have been confirmed, 16,559 cases have been discharged and 769 deaths have been recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.
- The 591 new cases are reported from 17 states - Oyo(191), Lagos (168), FCT(61), Ondo(29), Osun(26), Ebonyi (24), Edo(23), Ogun(14), Rivers(13), Akwa Ibom (12), Kaduna(10), Katsina(6), Borno (4), Ekiti(3), Delta(3), Imo(3), Niger (1)
- A multi-sectoral national emergency operations centre (EOC), activated at Level 3, continues to coordinate the national response activities.

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