LESSONS FROM COVID-19 AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACHIEVING SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

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ABSTRACT

CORONA, which means the crown like appearance of the surface in the morphological structure of viruses is a new strain of human coronavirus which has become a topical issue in this 21st century. The first appearance of the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) was recorded in the Wuhan City of Hubei province, China. Prior to the rise of the global pandemic, the world was moving in the state of normalcy despite the fact that the impacts of climate change were being felt globally. The inception of the COVID-19 accompanied with its impacts on human life as well as the environment if for nothing at all has brought to light how we can mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. With reference to how the COVID-19 has been addressed, the researcher sought to draw four lessons which can be applied in responding to climate change. The significance of the study is to achieve target 3 of SDG 13. It can be concluded that just like the COVID-19 took the efforts of everyone to arrive at the current solutions, similarly, if we all participate in the call to climate action through education, awareness, practice and commitment towards the mitigation and adaptation strategies as outlined by world leaders we will sooner or later come to a lasting solution of climate change and its adverse impacts on humanity and the environment. It is recommended that we all have a mental and an attitudinal change towards climate change and respond to the call to climate action.

Keyword: - *COVID-19, Climate Change, Climate Action.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 History and Causes of Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)

The human coronavirus which has become a topical issue in this 21st century was first isolated by Tyrell and Bynoe in 1965 from the respiratory tract of a patient who complained of common cold [13]. The virus was given the name B814 as researchers failed to grow the agent in the culture media. A study by Hamre and Procknow also reported a similar kind of virus but named it 229E which they isolated from the samples of a medical student with common cold [9]. In the later part of 1960, a group of virologists led by Tyrell studied different strains of human and animal viruses which included mouse hepatitis virus, infectious bronchitis virus, and transmissible gastroenteritis of swine. All these viruses were morphologically the same as demonstrated by electron microscopic study [8][7]. The study revealed a new genus of viruses which they named CORONA, which means the crown like appearance of the surface in the morphological structure of viruses.

The first appearance of the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) was recorded in the Wuhan City of Hubei province, China [7[. On the 30th of January 2020, the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 as a global pandemic [17] and as such gave guidelines as to how to contain the spread of the virus. The WHO database as of 12th June 2020 confirms a total number of 7, 410, 510 cases with a total death pool of 418, 294 in 216 countries [4][12]. With the availability of rapid testing kits, the numbers keep increasing on a daily basis despite the measures put in place by world leaders to address the phenomenon. The first human cases of the COVID-19 is believed to have resulted from exposure of infected animals of which infected people can equally spread it other others.

COVID-19 is an illness known to be caused by a virus that can spread from person to person and the causative virus is a new coronavirus that has spread throughout the world with symptoms ranging from mild or no symptoms to severe illness [2]. The Center for Disease Control also stipulates that the symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure. These symptoms typically include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Some people infected with the virus have reported experiencing other non-respiratory symptoms. Other people, referred to as asymptomatic cases, have experienced no symptoms at all [14].

1.2 Problem and Objective

Prior to the rise of the global pandemic, the world was moving in the state of normalcy despite the fact that the impacts of climate change were being felt globally. High emissions from industries, transportation, households, agriculture and the growing numbers in human population which contributed to climate change were accelerating speedily but everyone seemed to turn death ear to it despite the efforts of the UN and other government initiatives. The inception of the COVID-19 accompanied with its impacts on human life as well as the environment, if for nothing at all has brought to light how we can mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. With reference to how the covid-19 has been addressed, the researcher sought to draw four lessons which can be applied in responding to climate change. The significance of the study is to achieve target 3 of SDG 13 which is to "Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning."

2. LESSONS FROM COVID-19 AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACHIEVING SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

The inception of the COVID-19 in December 2019 to some extent is esteemed to be a blessing in disguise since it has the potential to offer guiding principles in our quest to fight climate change and its associated impacts on human livelihood. Target 3 of the SDG 13 which is to "Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning" [5] one way or the other is likely to be achieved by 2030 as stipulated by the United Nations. Several efforts that have been put in place to address the global challenge has always been made the sole responsibilities of leaders in high office. This has made it difficult to fully comprehend the issues and provide lasting solutions the problem.

2.1 Lesson One: Knowledge

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, series of education about the spread, infection rate, impacts and preventive measures were well outlined and broadcasted globally for all and sundry to know what the world was up to. Media houses were charged to include the broadcasting of the knowledge in their daily programs. The World Health Organization (WHO) through its high office outlined guidelines to which every member country was to comply among which includes but not limited to frequent washing of hands with soap, wearing of nose masks, social distancing of 1 to 2 meters and frequent hand sanitizing [17]. Aside this, the WHO gave weekly and bi-weekly briefings to update the guidelines already given out. Leaders of most countries were no exception of these daily, weekly and monthly briefings [15]. On top of it all, economies of most countries were shut-down with boarders closed in other to contain and control the spread of the virus.

Judging from how world leaders handled the COVID-19, lessons can be learnt from it to equally make room for the mitigation and adaption of climate change. It must be worthy of note that understanding the problem ensure effective approach to eradicate it. It appears majority of the people globally do not understand the concept of climate change and see no need to partake in the call to action. Compared to the COVID-19 pandemic, there seem to be little education on the subject matter of climate change and hence the need to begin mass education on the causes, impacts and mitigation measures to climate change. This education can begin from basic schools through to the tertiary, community based through media broadcasting and the use of social media and other means of communication to get the message across just as the COVID-19.

2.2 Lesson Two: Awareness

The consistency in the spread of information about COVID-19, created a greater sense of awareness among all classes of the global populace and hence the reduction in the number of casualties. Although a total number of

approximately 7.5 million confirmed cases have been recorded since the outbreak in December, a total number of approximately 422,000 death has been recorded [17][3]. The logic behind the numbers to some extent is as a result of the awareness that has been created by world leaders and other corporate bodies. For example, The Kenyan Ministry of Health (MOH) in the wake of the coronavirus launched a COVID-19 Taskforce to steer the country's prevention, containment and mitigation measures [1].

Learning from this scenarios, the impacts of climate change on agriculture with threatens food security, water quality, loss of biodiversity, air pollution, sea level rise and pest and disease outbreak just to mention a few can equally be reduced if people become aware of the gravitating impacts of climate change on their livelihood. The issues of poverty and hunger related diseases which threatens human life as a result of climate change will be a thing of the past if there is awareness among people in most affected areas.

2.3 Lesson Three: Practice

The knowledge and the awareness that made people to be informed about the seriousness of the COVID-19 led to a shift in attitudinal change among the citizenry. People became conscious of the need to take action in relation to their personal hygiene. Children and adults who had forgotten the principles of personal hygiene had a wakeup call to go back to the basics. In line with the WHO guidelines for curbing the global pandemic, people begun to respond in good faith by practicing frequent hand washing and sanitizing as they came to know that, the means of spread of infection was through handshaking and touching of surfaces that had been exposed to the virus. Additionally, people begun to practice social distancing between 1 to 2 meters as well as wearing of nose mask when one wants to communicate with others as the means of spread is through droplets from an infected person [17].

Similarly, climate change can be mitigated from the anthropogenic point of view if people begin to practice similar guidelines laid down by the United Nations Environment Programme which entails Reduce, Reuse and Recycle [16][11][10]. The knowledge and awareness of climate change should lead to a paradigm shift in the attitude of individuals in their quest to use resources which have high impacts on the environment. People should be geared towards reducing their energy consumption such as electricity through the use of energy saving appliances, environmentally friendly appliances and switching to green energy. Additionally, waste generated in household should be reduced in other to limit the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into space at the landfill sites. If the idea of the 3Rs is effectively complied to nicely then there will be large discount in greenhouse fuel emission and also present reduced health problems, saving landfill areas and helping to enhance the climate inside the long run.

2.4 Lesson Four: Commitment

The commitment towards addressing the devastating effects of COVID-19 was seen from donation of food items, Personal Protective Equipment (nose masks, hand sanitizers, soap), testing kits and monetary support just to mention a few. These donations came from individuals as well as Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations to help vulnerable and affected individuals to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. There seemed to a sense of urgency and a call to action to help in the fight against the pandemic. The height of the commitment was seen in the effort of the World Bank to offer an amount of USD $1 Billion to developing countries to help in the fight against the pandemic of which Kenya was a beneficiary [18]

Despite the fact that climate change has received several commitments from world leaders from the United Nations and other government bodies, the commitment from people i.e. children, youth and adult is limited as compared to how the covid-19 is being attended to. There must be a deliberate effort to equally comply with the protocols established by the United Nations Environment Programme in our quest to mitigate and adapt to climate change. In Kenya for example, mitigation measures to climate change as stipulated by the Environmental Management and Coordination Act of 1999 [6] required all industrial concerns to regularly carry out periodic environmental audits and undertake new environmental impact assessments before they are established but the commitment to ensure the promotion and adoption of environmentally-friendly technologies is a big issue which needs to be addressed.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It can be concluded that, the fight against climate change does not lie only in the hands of the United Nations and the government machinery of countries. Rather it is a call to action by all and sundry just like the COVID-19 took the efforts of everyone to arrive at the current solutions. In as much as there has not been any vaccine to fully eradicate

the global pandemic at the moment, we know and believe that with the efforts being put in place by all stakeholders, sooner or later a lasting solution will be made available to restore life to normalcy. Similarly, if we all participate to the call to climate action through education, awareness, practice and commitment towards the mitigation and adaptation strategies as outlined by world leaders we will sooner or later come to a lasting solution of climate change and its adverse impacts on humanity and the environment.

It is recommended that we all have a mental and an attitudinal change towards climate change and respond to the call to climate action. World leaders should make it a conscious effort to invest in education and awareness of climate change and its adverse impacts just as they are attending to the COVID-19.

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