

COVID-19 MUTATIONS AND THE 'NEW NORMAL' IN THE GAMBIAN ECONOMY: IMPLICATIONS AND THE NEED FOR A STRATEGIC NATIONAL RECOVERY PLAN.

By

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INTRODUCTION

- The whole world has indeed entered into an era of the 'new normal' with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.
- In the Gambia, the economy have witnessed unprecedented crises due to the mutating nature of the virus that has led to emergence of different waves and COVID-19 variants.
- There has been little or no effort towards initiating a strategic national recovery plan, especially for post-pandemic Gambia

- Several efforts by the government to resuscitate the nation's economy have been through massive campaign on vaccination and how citizens and travelers can protect themselves from contracting the COVID-19 virus.
- As laudable as these activities have been, the Gambia has not fully recovered from the pandemic and there are no concrete strategic plans for the post-pandemic recovery in the nation's economy.
- Therefore, this paper examined the effects of the COVID-19 mutations on the Gambian economy and the need for a national strategic recovery plan in the country.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

- Efforts by the government have largely focused on motivating people to get vaccinated and prescribing restrictions to reduce the spread of the virus.
- Little or nothing is being done towards the formulation of a strategic national recovery plan for the post-pandemic era in the Gambia
- Despite the effort of the Gambian government to normalize the situation, the economy seem not to have fully recovered as expected.

- Thus, this study seeks to examine the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the economy with a bid to proffering a national strategic plan for post-pandemic recovery.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the effect of COVID-19 on the Gambian economy?
2. Is there any need to review the current national COVID-19 reaction plan?
3. Is there need for a national recovery plan in post-pandemic Gambia?

HYPOTHESES

- H_0 : There is a negative relationship between COVID-19 Mutations and the Gambian Economy.
- H_1 : There is a positive relationship between COVID-19 Mutations and the Gambian Economy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SYSTEM THEORY

- The study employs the system theory as a framework. This theory was developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1937 during the presentation of his idea of a “General System Theory” in a philosophy seminar at the University of Chicago (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). However, David Easton in (1953) adapted and popularized the theory into public administration.
- The main thrust of the theory is based on David Easton’s systems framework, policy/decision making is seen as a process which involves system interactions with the environment (i.e. emanating from the demands of the environment).
- System theorists argued that a society functions effectively when it operates like a living organism in an open system and not a closed system.

- The theory is premised on the idea that an effective system is based on individual needs, rewards, expectations, and the attributes of the people living within the system.
- Thus, the Gambia as a macro system with its' micro systems that work in synergy with the overall goals and objectives of the macro-system, must factorize the microsystems while responding/reacting to any challenges/emergencies (e.g. COVID-19 mutations) within the system(state) for a lasting solution.

METHODOLOGY

- The paper adopted the survey research design using structured 4-point Likert scale questionnaire for primary collection.
- The population of this study comprised the senior and management staff in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) and the business community (banks, manufacturing companies, Gambia Tourism Board, Gambia Teachers union, private and public hospitals among others) in The Gambia. Using simple random sampling, the whole population of the nineteen (19) senior and middle management staff of Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) and one hundred and twelve (112) respondents from the business community totaling one hundred and thirty one (131) samples were selected for this study.

- The paper made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected using questionnaire and in-depth interview.
- The data collected for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistical method such as simple percentages and chi square statistics.

VARIABLES IN THE STUDY

- COVID-19 mutation is the independent variable while the economy is the dependent variable.
- By this, the major concern of the study was to see how the COVID-19 mutation has been able to affect the economy of The Gambia

Research Instrument and Validation Procedures

- Two research instruments were used for the study.
- The first was a self-designed 8-item questionnaire with a 4-likert scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The instrument has two parts labeled A to B.
- The second instrument is a structured interview questions on the dependent variable of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

- Findings revealed that the respondents strongly agreed that COVID-19 mutations had a negative effect on the Gambian economy.
- The study attributed rise in unemployment rates in the Gambia to COVID-19 and its mutations.
- Still on the effect of COVID-19 on the Gambian economy, one hypothesis was drawn and tested.
- The hypothesis was that: there is a negative relationship between COVID-19 Mutations and the Gambian Economy.

- The Chi-Square tests showed the critical value of 98.3063 greater than the calculated value of 95; the likelihood ratio is 76.756; while Linear by Linear Association is 17.871.
- Consequently, the study rejected the alternative hypothesis and accepted the null hypothesis, which means that there is a negative relationship between COVID-19 Mutations and the Gambian Economy.
- The study was concluded with the call for the Gambia government to develop a national strategic plan for recovery in the post-pandemic.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

- COVID-19 has affected the Gambian economy adversely.
- There is need to review the current COVID-19 restriction/reaction plan through massive awareness programmes and enforcement of the use of mask in public places, especially in political rallies.
- So far, the Gambia has no strategic national recovery plan for the post-pandemic era.

- The government and other stakeholders like the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MFEA) and those in the business community must set up independent committees to develop a strategic national recovery plan for post-pandemic Gambia.
- While the control and fight against the pandemic is being done at the sub-regional or ECOWAS level, post-pandemic recovery plans must be strategic and have a national outlook.

- There is a need to get the Gambian people more to stop believing that COVID-19 is a hoax.
- Gambians need to be mobilized and encouraged to embrace COVID-19 vaccination so that the nation can begin the journey to post-pandemic recovery.

CONCLUSION

- The study explored the effect of COVID-19 mutations on the Gambian economy with focus on the need for a national strategic recovery plan. Three objectives were achieved by the study.
- First, it evaluated the effect of COVID-19 on the Gambia economy. Second, it assessed the need to review the current national COVID-19 reaction plan.
- Lastly, the study examined the need for a national recovery plan in post-pandemic Gambia.
- Two research instruments, three research questions and one hypothesis were used in the study.

- The research design adopted was a survey and a total of 120 respondents from different government agencies participated in the study.
- Data were collected with the aid of questionnaires and structured interview and the result revealed that COVID-19 had significant negative effect on the Gambian economy.
- Respondents also agreed that there is need for a national strategic recovery plan if the nation will emerge stronger in the post-pandemic era.

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THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION

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