



Global Briefing - International Comparators of Covid-19 Responses

Briefing Note | August 2020

This document endeavours to provide a framework to assist Federal and State Governments in Nigeria to adopt a holistic approach to considering options for reopening educational institutions. While recognising the peculiarity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as one of the four federal republics in Africa, and the implications of concurrent powers that both Federal and State Governments have, several case studies and learnings are drawn from African and other countries to enable decision-makers to distil practices that are relevant and beneficial to the Nigerian context.

An abridged Program Response Mechanism is also included as a starter for state governments.

Introduction

The purpose of this briefing is to provide decision makers in the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) useful comparative case studies to inform policies on limiting the spread of COVID-19, whilst also planning for appropriate lifting of any necessary restrictions.

To do this we have looked at a number of countries that share some common characteristics with Nigeria (demographics, economic situation, governance structure, etc.) and examine their successes and failures to provide useful examples for FGN decision makers. Given the global spread of the virus, different rates at which it has spread, ways in which governments have sought to tackle it and the ways in which cases, deaths, and rate of infection/reproduction are measured across countries and in different contexts, we are conscious that it is difficult to draw direct comparisons from country to country. We do note the value that case study examples provide, and the insights that can be drawn from a more in-depth review and assessment of how other countries have sought to contain the virus, manage socio-economic challenges, and begin to “unlock” and loosen restrictions.

The focus of this report centres on the experiences of Pakistan and Malaysia. As with the previous briefing paper (covering India and Argentina), these cases are also federated unions, however they display a diverse range of social, political and economic challenges peculiar to the respective contexts and so offer useful insights into the management and response to Coronavirus, lockdown and the lifting of restrictions. Both cases offer potential for learning and further analysis.

A broad framework was applied to both examples, including: summary; the actions that have been taken; responsibility for those actions; what worked; what did not work; potential next steps for in their response; and, broad lessons that could be drawn and developed for the Nigeria context.

Executive Summary

This Global Briefing has undertaken a rapid assessment of the COVID-19 response in Pakistan and Malaysia. In doing so, the paper has developed useful insights into the responses in those countries; and crucially has drawn several lessons for further discussion and exploration. This includes:

- The importance of developing and maintaining clear and consistent communications around lockdown strategies and the requirements placed upon society, business, and authorities.
- Regional coordination to manage supply chain and logistical challenges.
- Role of intergovernmental organisations in facilitating lesson learning and information sharing.
- Potential for the involvement of community volunteer groups to support the COVID-19 response where the ability of governing institutions to provide support is limited.
- Leveraging domestic scientific and technical research capacity to support the response.

Pakistan: Pakistan has lacked a clear and consistent strategy to respond to the Coronavirus. The federal government, led by Prime Minister Imran Khan, has been keen to pursue a “smart” approach to lockdown, for fear that a draconian nationwide lockdown would have severe social, economic (and health) implications on the most vulnerable in society. Yet despite this, jostling amongst senior officials and powerful institutions has seen first, the military stepping in to oversee a strict nationwide lockdown, followed in turn by a Supreme Court ruling that in effect brought an end to mandatory lockdown. The result of this confusion is only now beginning to become evident, with COVID-19 cases beginning to surge and hospitals approaching capacity. The country appears now at a critical juncture in its Coronavirus response. Recent steps have been taken to institute “smart” lockdown measures – as originally planned – with provincial authorities responsible for the identification of COVID-19 “hotspots” and the imposition of strict but localised containment measures. The effectiveness of this policy remains to be seen and will need close monitoring as the situation begins to evolve. Given the economic challenges and restrictions faced by governing authorities and individuals alike, the Pakistan case does represent a good example to demonstrate what can be done to utilise existing resources to respond to the health crisis. Domestic scientific and technical research capacity has been leveraged to develop a cost-effective COVID-19 testing kit to enable an increase in testing capacity, and a volunteer “Tiger Force” has been established to coordinate volunteers as they help implement lockdown restrictions and offer basic service provision.

Malaysia: Malaysia’s experience has been in stark contrast to that of Pakistan. Despite a political crisis at the start of the health emergency, the country has instituted a robust top-down approach to lockdown and wider COVID-19 response, driven in large part by public health officials. The lockdown measures have been strict and meticulously enforced, but the result has been a clear, consistent, and effective process of lockdown combined with a rigorous testing and tracing regime. Where public officials have been found in breach of restrictions, they have been held accountable and in some cases fined, providing the public with a strong and clear message that the rules are there for a reason and compliance is required by all. The country took early action to prepare its health infrastructure for a surge in cases, meaning that health authorities have been able to institute relatively widespread testing, and patients testing COVID-19 positive are required to quarantine at hospital. Responsibility for the response has been directed by the Federal Government and whilst State Authorities are responsible for implementation, the expectation is clear that they are to comply with and enforce federal legislation. The case of Malaysia is interesting for the emphasis placed on international cooperation and engagement. Measures have been taken to manage supply chains and port infrastructure to avoid delays to the import of essential medical supplies and to support the export of produce that would otherwise spoil and result in a glut. A recent ASEAN conference has provided the opportunity for Malaysia to share its key digital initiatives in the fight against Coronavirus and supported the sharing of data and learning on how countries in the region have responded to the virus.

Case Study Assessments

1. Pakistan

Pakistan confirmed the first cases of Coronavirus in the country on 26th February, and by 18th March Coronavirus cases had been registered in all four provinces, the two autonomous territories and the federal territory of Islamabad.¹ Early attempts were made to enforce a strict lockdown regime in the country, however after an intervention from the Supreme Court calling for the reopening of shopping malls on 18th May, lockdown restrictions were effectively curtailed and replaced by general guidance calling for people to maintain social distancing – in the absence of any formal nationwide lockdown.

After a surge in cases following Eid Festivities, steps have again been taken to impose “smart” lockdown restrictions, with targeted containment measures being imposed in COVID-19 hotspots, to limit the spread of the virus whilst also minimising economic damage. The country (along with India) is beginning to witness a surge in COVID-19 cases and appears at a critical juncture in its Coronavirus response.

What did Pakistan do?

(i) Lockdown

Pakistan’s lockdown strategy has been inconsistent and poorly communicated. After recording cases of Coronavirus in late February, steps were taken to impose a tight nationwide lockdown and travel restrictions – as seen in many countries across the globe, including neighbouring India. However, the decision to impose strict containment measures proved controversial from the start, and competing factions have sought to influence the scope and nature of lockdown.

Key to the case of Pakistan is the effect the lockdown has had on marginalised groups and those most vulnerable in society. The ability of the state to provide financial and other support to a large population unable to work is limited, and the economic costs and effects of lockdown have proved unsustainable. Prime Minister Imran Khan warned that an estimated 150 million individuals (including, rickshaw/taxi drivers, street hawkers, shopkeepers, etc.) would face hunger if they are isolated at home and not able to work due to the lockdown.²

As such, without prior approval from public health authorities (but with tacit support from Federal Government), Pakistan’s Supreme Court ordered an effective end to formal nationwide lockdown restrictions, declaring that the coronavirus is “not a pandemic in Pakistan” and ruling that from 18th May the government is to reopen businesses seven days a week and provincial government is to allow the reopening of shopping malls.³ The focus since this ruling has been on enabling economic activity to continue, whilst calling for the public to maintain social distancing as guided. The success of which is unclear, and recent Eid Festivities have led to fears that the country can expect to see a surge in cases in June.⁴ This fear is beginning to hold true as current reporting indicates roughly 20 – 25% of those tested for Coronavirus are infected.^{5,6}

The latest iteration of lockdown in Pakistan is focused on deploying “smart” restrictions, with localised virus hotspots being sealed off under strict lockdown and containment regimes. The aim being to arrest the spread of the virus while also minimising economic disruption.⁷ The “smart” lockdown restrictions favoured by Prime Minister Khan, will entail the sealing off of hotspot areas, with no travel in or out of the area. The National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) and Provincial Governments have begun to identify areas showing clusters of reported Coronavirus cases,

¹ <https://www.geo.tv/latest/277853-coronavirus-updates-march-18-latest-news-on-the-coronavirus-outbreak-from-pakistan-and-around-the-world>

² <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/pakistans-top-court-ends-coronavirus-lockdown>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/qimpact/pakistan-top-court-orders-businesses-reopen-200519065136611.html>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/24/middle-east-fears-a-coronavirus-surge-amid-eid-celebrations>

⁵ <http://covid.gov.pk/stats/pakistan>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/10/global-report-who-urges-pakistan-to-return-to-lockdown-as-hospitals-struggle>

⁷ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/pakistan-seals-virus-hot-spots-new-lockdown-strategy-aims-minimise/>

these include some areas as small as a single street and other areas including neighbourhoods or wider administrative areas.⁸ So far, the authorities have shut down residential localities in approximately 20 key cities, including Islamabad and Lahore.⁹

(ii) Contact Tracing

Pakistan's contact tracing regime has proved controversial, as the track and trace system adopted by the government was originally developed by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) to combat terrorism.¹⁰ While there have been no reported cases of improper use of the system, the lack of data protection laws and absence of a privacy commission have raised concerns – especially given the leak online of the personal details of thousands of COVID-19 volunteers.¹¹

Nevertheless, the implementation of an effective contact tracing system is a crucial element of Prime Minister Imran Khan's desire to reopen the economy and adopt a "smart" lockdown approach. It is currently too early to assess the effectiveness of the system.

(iii) Testing

Given the increasing number of recorded Coronavirus cases and concern that the country's already under resourced and underfunded health care system would become overwhelmed by a surge in COVID-19 patients, steps have been taken to support the development of domestically produced testing kits.

In June, the National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST) received approval from the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) for their N-CovKit after successful testing. The locally developed kits will significantly increase the testing capacity, much needed in order to contain the virus while also minimising the economic harm of lockdown.¹²

It is being reported that Pakistan now has the capacity to conduct 1.2 million tests in a month, and the development of domestic testing kits will enable significant cost reductions – with the kits being available at a lower price compared to imported ones and also reducing associated import costs.¹³

However, whilst some success has been achieved and steps taken to increase testing capacity, testing still remains low. Atta ur Rahman, Chairman of the Task Force on Science and Technology conceded that "virus testing is too low and random testing virtually doesn't exist".¹⁴ This is a challenge not peculiar to Pakistan.

(iv) Exiting Lockdown

As early as 8th May, Pakistan began taking steps to ease restrictions and exit from lockdown. This has proved controversial, with the announcement to ease restrictions coinciding with the country's then highest daily increase in new cases.¹⁵ Indeed, pressure to exit lockdown in Pakistan appears to be guided more by economic factors rather than health, with a judgement being made that lockdown itself represents more of a threat to the poorest in society.¹⁶

This balance between containing the virus, public health, and lifting lockdown restrictions in support of economic growth is an important one. In countries such as Pakistan, where there is limited social security and economic safety nets for those most vulnerable, the decision is made all the more pressing.

⁸ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/pakistan-seals-virus-hot-spots-new-lockdown-strategy-aims-minimise/>

⁹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-17/pakistan-is-understating-infections-deaths-from-virus-official>

¹⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/pakistan-intelligence-services-track-coronavirus-cases-200424073528205.html>

¹¹ <https://privacyinternational.org/examples/3929/pakistan-fails-remedy-security-flaws-covid-19-tracking-system>

¹² <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2201998/1-asad-umar-stresses-need-mass-social-mobilisation-cope-covid-19/>

¹³ <https://gulfnnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/pakistans-first-covid-19-testing-kit-approved-1.72012282>

¹⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-17/pakistan-is-understating-infections-deaths-from-virus-official>

¹⁵ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-pakistan/pakistan-to-start-easing-lockdown-amid-sharp-coronavirus-spread-idUKKBN22J2A3>

¹⁶ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-pakistan/pakistan-to-start-easing-lockdown-amid-sharp-coronavirus-spread-idUKKBN22J2A3>

After an early “exit” from lockdown and Supreme Court order for the government to reintroduce 7-day trading, the focus now is on re-imposing “smart” containment measures to allow the country and economy to function, whilst also containing peaks in COVID-19 cases.

Where does responsibility reside for Covid-19 responses in Pakistan?

Responsibility for Pakistan’s nationwide COVID-19 response has been directed by the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC); however, the implementation of lockdown measures has been contested by a number of institutions. Prime Minister Imran Khan appeared to be side lined by the military, when 24 hours after announcing on 22nd March that his government would not be instituting a strict lockdown, the military issued a further announcement that they would be deploying troops across Pakistan to oversee a shutdown to contain the virus.¹⁷ This was in turn followed by a Supreme Court ordering on 18th May calling for the lifting of trading restrictions and re-opening of shopping malls.¹⁸ The apparent power struggle amongst Pakistan’s ruling elite to determine the shape, nature and scope of the country’s response to the virus has resulted in a confused strategy and has undermined public trust.

It is important to note that provincial authorities have been involved in the COVID-19 response, with some of the earliest measures to contain the virus taken independently by local authorities. As early as January the government of Gilgit Baltistan issued a request to the federal government to delay the opening of the Khunjerab Pass border crossing with China; the Balochistan authorities also began taking precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus;¹⁹ and, Pakistan-administered Kashmir took the decision to reimpose lockdown measures on May 18th whilst other provinces had begun a process of easing restrictions.²⁰

Recent measures to introduce localised “smart” lockdown restrictions, while directed by the Federal-level NCOC, is delivered in consultation with provincial authorities. With provincial authorities leading on the identification and lockdown of potential COVID-19 hotspots.²¹ The role of provincial and local authorities will be an important element in the success of the “smart” lockdown strategy.

What worked in Pakistan?

Utilising Volunteers: A COVID-19 ‘Tiger Force’ has been established to monitor social distancing and support the poor. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers have registered for the civilian volunteer scheme which will support the monitoring of social distancing, distribute emergency food and cash payments.²² While it is currently difficult to gauge overall success of the scheme, early reports have proved positive, with examples of interfaith groups providing support to local communities²³ and large tracts of youth feeling they have a role to play in supporting their nation’s Coronavirus response.²⁴

Mobilising Scientific Expertise: Although testing capacity remains relatively low, the development of a domestic testing kit by the National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST) represents a positive achievement. The NUST team initially cooperated with a number of international research institutes and received support from the Pakistan National Institute of Health. ASAB Principal Dr Hussnain Janjua believes the “test kits developed at NUST have unlocked the potential of local universities to contribute in national development”.²⁵

¹⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/686714d7-ae05-431d-a13d-1966153be151>

¹⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/qjimpact/pakistan-top-court-orders-businesses-reopen-200519065136611.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1530743>

²⁰ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistan-administered-kashmir-reimposes-lockdown/1844455>

²¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/pakistan-seals-virus-hot-spots-new-lockdown-strategy-aims-minimise/>

²² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/pakistan-recruits-covid-19-tiger-force-monitor-social-distancing/>

²³ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistans-non-muslim-volunteers-join-fight-against-covid-19/1796883>

²⁴ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/pakistan-recruits-covid-19-tiger-force-monitor-social-distancing/>

²⁵ <https://gulfnnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/pakistans-first-covid-19-testing-kit-approved-1.72012282>

What did not work in Pakistan?

Poor Coordination: Although the number of cases and deaths from Coronavirus remained low at first²⁶, efforts to contain the virus have not been through a coordinated or well-managed process. Differences in policy have arisen and provinces have at times been required to act unilaterally.²⁷

Poor Communication: Opposition leaders have blamed the government's mixed messaging for adding to confusion and undermining public trust in the country's strategy.²⁸ The effects of this inconsistent response and poor communication are potentially very harmful. There is an increasing number of reports that medical staff are now being faced with open hostility and even violence, in large part due to hospitals being at full capacity and unable to cope with demand.²⁹ Government claims that ventilators and other medical equipment are available is often far from the truth, resulting in reports of bribery and corruption as people with links to senior officials call in favours to ensure they or their loved ones are treated first.³⁰ In the absence of clear and consistent messaging, misinformation and conspiracy theories have been able to spread - largely over social media - resulting in the circulation of falsehoods and claims that medical staff are "killing patients and falsely claiming they died of COVID-19" – the atmosphere is febrile and dangerous.³¹

Poor data reliability: Although steps are being taken to increase testing, the availability and reliability of Coronavirus data is a challenge. An example of this can be seen in contradictory reporting on infections, with an official announcement made on June 8th that over 100,000 cases of Coronavirus had been recorded nationally, while a few days earlier a leaked government report suggested that there were nearly 700,000 infections in Lahore alone.³² Although the purpose of this briefing paper is not to validate the data being reported, it is clear that the reliability of such data is a challenge and this will have an impact on effective decision making and planning.

Limited Economic Support: Lockdown has proved unsustainable in Pakistan, with limited economic support available to support large sections of society dependent on a cash income. The reopening of the economy has been viewed as a necessity by the Federal authorities. Recent measures were introduced to provide an \$8 billion economic stimulus package, including funds to low-income families (to be disbursed through \$75 grants), however by the end of April only \$390 million in funds had been disbursed to over 5 million people.³³

What next steps are being planned by Pakistan?

Pakistan appears to be at a critical juncture. Key decisions have been taken on the easing of lockdown restrictions seemingly driven by economic rather than health factors, and the effects of this appear to be showing now; with a surge in recorded Coronavirus cases (approximately 20 - 25% of those tested)³⁴ and increasing concern that in a country where there are just six hospital beds per 10,000 people,³⁵ hospitals are already beginning to warn that they are running out of beds to treat patients.³⁶ Pakistan appears not to have managed to "flatten the curve" of coronavirus cases vs. health capacity.

With the (re-)introduction of "smart" lockdown restrictions, the next step is anticipated to involve the introduction of an intermittent lockdown. A letter from the World Health Organisation appeared to suggest that an intermittent lockdown (with two-weeks-on and two-weeks-off) could potentially provide the balance between tackling the virus while not stifling the economy.³⁷ A similar approach

²⁶ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/pakistans-low-death-rate-could-indicate-coronavirus-less-virulent/>

²⁷ <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/lockdown-or-no-lockdown-confusion-dominates-pakistans-covid-response>

²⁸ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/pakistan-seals-virus-hot-spots-new-lockdown-strategy-aims-minimise/>

²⁹ <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/18/879892170/surging-covid-19-cases-in-pakistan-overwhelm-hospitals>

³⁰ <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/18/879892170/surging-covid-19-cases-in-pakistan-overwhelm-hospitals>

³¹ <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/18/879892170/surging-covid-19-cases-in-pakistan-overwhelm-hospitals>

³² <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/coronavirus-pakistan-hospitals-running-out-of-beds-as-cases-surge-past-100000>

³³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/pakistan-intelligence-services-track-coronavirus-cases-200424073528205.html>

³⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-06-15/coronavirus-lockdowns-after-second-wave-may-be-more-flexible>

³⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/pakistan-hospitals-struggle-coronavirus-cases-explode-200612084123797.html>

³⁶ <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/coronavirus-pakistan-hospitals-running-out-of-beds-as-cases-surge-past-100000>

³⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/10/global-report-who-urges-pakistan-to-return-to-lockdown-as-hospitals-struggle>

has been tried in Jordan and also Turkey, where a number of intermittent weekend lockdowns have been held.³⁸

Lessons for Nigeria from Pakistan

- Political unity and coordination are needed to develop a coherent strategy;
- Clear and consistent messaging is needed to deliver and maintain lockdown restrictions;
- A fine balance between the economy and public health is needed for a successful COVID-19 response;
- Leveraging internal scientific and research expertise is an important factor in developing an affordable testing regime.

2. Malaysia

Malaysia, like Nigeria, is a federalised upper-middle income country with a strong dependency on oil revenues. Malaysia's coronavirus response was initially marred by a recent political crisis, with valuable time spent forming a cabinet rather than responding to the growing pandemic.^{39,40} However, subsequent measures have been taken to effectively contain and control the spread of the virus.

What did Malaysia do?

(i) Lockdown

In response to the spread of Coronavirus, the Federal Government of Malaysia implemented a preventative lockdown from March 16th, termed the 2020 Movement Control Order.⁴¹ The restrictions prohibited mass gatherings and led to the closure of international borders, and all government and private premises except for those providing essential services.⁴² After a number of extensions, the MCO was replaced on 4th May by the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) and then by the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) on 10th June.

(ii) Testing

Malaysia has adopted a robust approach to contact tracing and testing, with a recent government decree calling for compulsory COVID-19 screening of foreign workers across all sectors, with the expectation that employers are to pay for the tests.⁴³

Private sector has also been leveraged to support demand for testing, with a consortium of private laboratories providing access to testing facilities at an affordable price.⁴⁴

Crucially – and, despite political uncertainty – the authorities were proactive in their approach to testing and as early as December 2019, reagents needed for diagnostic testing were ordered and plans developed to reorganise and prepare hospitals in the event of an outbreak of the virus.⁴⁵ Moreover, all those diagnosed as COVID-19 positive are required to be hospitalised.⁴⁶

However, despite key achievements in the development of an effective testing regime, there have been challenges implementing this system in some States. The Federal Government has been urged to maintain close coordination with the State Governments of Sabah and Sarawak, where ongoing

³⁸ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/two-weeks-two-weeks-intermittent-lockdowns-could-help-pakistan/>

³⁹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/26/malaysia-preventable-coronavirus-disaster-political-crisis-muhyiddin-yassin/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/18/malaysia-has-triple-crisis-of-coronavirus-economy-and-politics-analyst.html>

⁴¹ <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/03/16/pm-malaysia-in-lockdown-from-wed-until-march-31-all-shops-closed-except-for/1847204>

⁴² <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/03/575177/covid-19-movement-control-order-imposed-only-essential-sectors-operating>

⁴³ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/malaysia-begins-to-ease-covid-19-lockdown-despite-lingering-concerns/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/04/08/covid-19-private-labs-ramp-up-sample-collection-and-testing-nationwide/1854662>

⁴⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/14/thailand-malaysia-vietnam-how-some-countries-kept-covid-at-bay>

⁴⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/14/thailand-malaysia-vietnam-how-some-countries-kept-covid-at-bay>

logistics issues and delays at ports had led to concerns that key medical supplies such as reagents for testing (and also food) could run short.⁴⁷

(iii) Contact Tracing

As with most cases, Malaysia has implemented a contact tracing application to track and trace Coronavirus infections. Although the success of the application remains difficult to evidence, Malaysia has also shared its key digital initiative in combatting COVID-19 with ASEAN member countries and China at the online opening ceremony of ASEAN-China Year of Digital Economy Cooperation.⁴⁸ The initiative seeks to support the cooperation and sharing of data on how countries in the region have responded to the virus.

Contact tracing forms a key part of Malaysia's lockdown strategy and there appears to be widespread appreciation for the need for tracing and compliance with measures taken to enable this. After relaxation of the MCO, shopping malls and restaurants were again able to trade, but strict measures were in place to manage the number of people entering establishments, and many places require customers to have their temperatures scanned and contact details recorded should they need to be traced.⁴⁹

(iv) Exiting Lockdown

Steps were taken to ease the lockdown on Monday 4th May, ahead of the planned end of lockdown. The focus has been on trying to revive the economy, however public health concerns have been raised. Nine of the country's 13 states have either refused to open up or have restricted the types of businesses that can operate. More than half a million Malaysians protested by signing an online petition calling for a more gradual easing of restrictions.⁵⁰ In response to public opinion, Phase 4 of the lockdown was extended until 10th June

After a number of extensions, the MCO was replaced on 4th May by the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) and then by the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO), with a focus on "unlocking" the economy in a controlled manner. This was in turn replaced by the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) phase from 10th June to 31st August. This phase marks an important development in the easing of Malaysia's lockdown. Interstate travel is now permitted (international borders remain closed to travel) and social, economic, educational and religious activities are now permitted to begin returning to normal – providing they abide by strict health protocols on social distancing, optimisation of space etc.⁵¹

Where does responsibility reside for COVID-19 responses in Malaysia?

Malaysia's response has been driven predominantly by public health officials through a top-down approach. Indeed, when nine of the country's 13 State Authorities refused to ease lockdown and movement restrictions as mandated by the Federal Government, they were warned that they could be liable to face legal action, including from business owners, for refusing to implement the new rules as enshrined in law. Datuk Seri Azmin, a Senior Minister, warned "the government takes seriously the position taken by the various state governments in refusing to execute the decision. their actions are not founded on lawful authority and are contrary to the policy of the federal government".⁵²

⁴⁷ <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/04/09/hua-zong-urges-putrajaya-to-ensure-enough-supply-of-covid-19-reagent-test-kits-in-sabah-sarawak>

⁴⁸ <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/malaysia-shares-key-digital-efforts-combating-covid19-asean-china>

⁴⁹ <https://www.palatinat.org.uk/life-in-lockdown-malaysia/>

⁵⁰ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/malaysia-begins-to-ease-covid-19-lockdown-despite-lingering-concerns/>

⁵¹ <https://www.thesundaily.my/home/cmco-ends-june-9-recovery-mco-from-june-10-to-aug-31-updated-EM2538754>

⁵² <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysias-states-should-ease-coronavirus-controls-in-line-with-federal-order-minister>

What worked in Malaysia?

Lockdown and Testing: The authorities have enforced a strict lockdown and have paired this with a rigorous system of testing, contact tracing and quarantine.⁵³ Anyone testing positive for COVID-19 is hospitalised and quarantined.

Clear Messaging and Communication: The response has been predominantly driven by public health officials, with clear, concise, and consistent messaging reinforcing lockdown rules and the expectations on public behaviour. Notably, where there has been misinformation - such as when the Health Minister suggested on TV that drinking warm water was a cure for the virus - this has been swiftly and effectively rebutted.⁵⁴ Likewise, when the Deputy Health Minister was photographed breaching lockdown rules, he was fined.⁵⁵ The key here is that a clear and consistent approach, without exception, maintains public trust in and compliance with steps taken to contain the virus.

Regional Approach: Malaysia adopted a regional approach to the Coronavirus challenge and has been successful in working closely with ASEAN neighbours to reinforce supply chains delivering essential goods and services⁵⁶ In Sabah, the state government sought to strengthen its food security through the reclamation of large tracts of land to be transformed into rice cultivation areas, the aim here being to reduce overdependence on supplier from Thailand and Vietnam.⁵⁷ Other fresh products have been exported to neighbouring states to help avoid a glut of supply.⁵⁸

Socio-Economic Support: Although still a developing country, given the relative wealth of the OPEC economy, steps have been taken to provide support to business, SMEs, and offer financial/tax breaks.⁵⁹

What did not work in Malaysia?

GESI and Do No Harm: Although Malaysia's tough approach to lockdown has proved instrumental in the containment of the virus, concerns have been raised that it has proved harmful to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in society. Lockdown and movement restrictions have made it difficult for migrant groups, especially Rohingya, to access support. Many are undocumented migrants working in Malaysia's informal economy, with limited access to state financial support, and given the challenging economic situation an estimated 80% of the refugees who had jobs before lockdown were now jobless.⁶⁰ The lack of financial support to these such marginalised groups has also been coupled with an increase in racial harassment and hate crime.⁶¹ The United Nations issued a condemnation of the detention of minority ethnic groups, refugees, and xenophobia.^{62 63}

What next steps is Malaysia planning?

Malaysia has recently initiated the latest phase in an easing lockdown. This is scheduled to run until 31st August.

⁵³ <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/04/30/malaysia-beats-brutal-covid-19-expectations/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/14/thailand-malaysia-vietnam-how-some-countries-kept-covid-at-bay>

⁵⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/14/thailand-malaysia-vietnam-how-some-countries-kept-covid-at-bay>

⁵⁶ <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/04/30/malaysia-beats-brutal-covid-19-expectations/>

⁵⁷ <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/04/584616/sabah-focus-sectors-ensure-food-security>

⁵⁸ <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/04/20/covid-19-sabah-to-export-vegetables-to-neighbouring-brunei-to-address-glut/1858431>

⁵⁹ <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/malaysia-tax-developments-in-response-to-covid-19.html>

⁶⁰ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-malaysia-rohingya/rohingya-targeted-in-malaysia-as-coronavirus-stokes-xenophobia-idUKKBN22Z00Q>

⁶¹ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-malaysia-rohingya/rohingya-targeted-in-malaysia-as-coronavirus-stokes-xenophobia-idUKKBN22Z00Q>

⁶² <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/02/malaysia-cites-covid-19-for-rounding-up-hundreds-of-migrants>

⁶³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/coronavirus-malaysia-outrage-women-ministry-makeup-lockdown-a9437851.html>

Lessons for Nigeria from Malaysia?

- Effective communication and consistent application of lockdown rules has proved important in maintaining public trust and delivering the lockdown strategy.
- Effective testing and tracing capacity are necessary for lockdown restrictions to ease, societal buy-in and compliance with these processes are needed.
- Regional approaches to supply chain management and logistics are needed to meet demand for food and medical essentials.
- Intergovernmental institutions (such as ASEAN) can provide a useful forum for sharing lessons and data on COVID-19 response.

Annex A

Framework for COVID-19 Global Briefing

What is success?

For our purposes of comparison, successful countries will have managed to ‘flatten the curve’ (keeping the rate of infection low enough so as to not overwhelm health resources⁶⁴) thereby providing an opportunity to reduce restrictions put in place to limit the transmission of COVID-19. The subsequent reduction in those restrictions will not have resulted in an increase in cases and deaths. It is important to note that comparisons in number of infections or deaths attributable to COVID-19 is extremely hard because each country has differing capacities of testing and reporting. However, our assumptions are (1) that reported numbers are accurate (unless noted) and (2) even if actual numbers are not accurate, the trend lines will indicate whether policy decisions are working or not.

Case Study Selection

Following initial discussions with the PERL Policy Advisory Team, we understood that the preference for the global reporting activity would be to focus on countries with similar governance structures and economic environments to those found in Nigeria. In particular, the focus should be on countries with Federal governance structures and middle-income economies.

In order to identify case study examples and ensure that relevant lessons and insights could be drawn across examples we undertook the following steps:

- Undertook an initial literature review to identify information sources, potential information gaps, areas for further analysis etc.
- Conducted a short survey/assessment to identify countries that are democratic with similar federal governance structures to those in Nigeria.
- Identified appropriate geographic scope. After initial research, it became apparent that the impact of Coronavirus has varied across geographic settings. Leading some commentators to suggest, the “pandemic is more usefully viewed as a series of distinct local epidemics”. As such, we wanted to assess measures taken by countries across a broad geographic setting (South America, Indian Sub-Continent, South East Asia) etc.⁶⁵

Through this process, we identified the following countries for further assessment: **India, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Argentina.**

⁶⁴ Dunn, Andy, *World Economic Forum, 2020, This coronavirus app shows why flattening the curve matters, World Economic Forum, 17 May 2020, <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-covid-19-infection-protect-flatten-the-curve-app-pandemic/>>*

⁶⁵ Vally, Hassan, *COSMOS: The Science of Everything, 2020, Measuring different responses to COVID-19, 01 May 2020, <<https://cosmosmagazine.com/biology/measuring-different-responses-to-covid-19>>*