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Gains and Pains of Cashless Policy on Akwete-Ndoki Community, Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of the cashless policy on Akwete Ndoki community in Abia state. This policy according to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) is to the best interest of Nigerians. It will help to check terrorism financing, counterfeiting and imbalances in fiscal space as well as to enable CBN take control of the currency in circulation. However, despite the perceived benefits of this policy, it also inflicted pains on the masses. The study anchored on the Modernization Theory as its theoretical framework. Data was collected using digital mixed method design which is made of structured questionnaire and in-depth interview guide which was administered electronically. For the analysis of the data, we used frequency count for the quantitative data and content analysis for the qualitative data. Findings showed that though the cashless policy may have a long-term benefit, the immediate effects on the people living in Akwete Ndoki community and nearby rural areas is pain, anguish and misery. Based on the findings the study recommends amongst others that in developing countries with low computer literacy like Nigeria, transition from full cash to cashless society should be a gradual process.

Keywords: Benefits, cashless policy, cashless society, Central Bank of Nigeria, pains

Introduction

Cash-less banking is that banking system which aims at reducing, but not eliminating, the volume of physical cash circulating in the economy whilst encouraging more electronic based transactions. In other words, it is a combination of e-banking and cash-based system. It is essentially a mobile payment system which allows users to make payment through GSM phones with or without internet facilities (Odior & Banuso, 2012; Akhalumeh &

Ohiokha, 2012). The G4S 2018 World Cash Report stated that cash is still the most universal and widespread payment method. In the study captioned - Cash is universal and Cash is available to all users, the study finds that although digital payment volumes have been growing fast, cash transaction volumes are also growing, showing that consumers like using a variety of payment tools for their purchases. Indeed, G4S states that “there shouldn’t be any competition between cash versus non-cash, nor should it be an either/or proposition. There is simply a need to make payments in all circumstances, and both cash and non-cash payment instruments adequately fulfill this need (World Cash Report, 2018).

The study further showed that overall, 17 out of 24 countries reported over 50% of transactions in cash. This number is up to 78.8% in Europe in terms of volume, and 53.8% in terms of value. The report also found that traditionally cashless companies and activities are beginning to offer cash payments as they widen their reach to appeal to the unbanked but also to consumers that have a preference for tangible money. For example, in the Arab world, 50% of online shoppers prefer Cash on Delivery and this number reaches 70% in Egypt (World Cash Report, 2018). Elechi and Rufus (2016) also noted that the US Central Bank recorded that more than two thirds of all non-cash transaction payments in the United States are made electronically, with the biggest increase in electronic payments occurring between 2003 and 2006.

Cashless economy is not the complete absence of cash, it is an economic setting in which goods and services are bought and paid for through electronic media. It is one in which there are assumed to be no transaction frictions that can be reduced through the use of money balances and that accordingly provide a reason for holding such balances even when they earn rate of income (Woodford, 2003). In a cashless economy, how much cash in your wallet is practically irrelevant. According to Ashike (2011) developed countries of the world, to a large extent, are moving away from paper payment toward electronic instrument especially payment cards. Some aspects of the functioning of the cashless economy are enhanced by e-finance, e-money, e-brokering and e-exchanges.

The Nigerians’ cashless policy dates back to 2012 when Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) stated her intention to reduce the cash in circulation among individual so that CBN and the Commercial banks can monitor the flow of cash. This according to CBN is in line with international best practice (CBN, 2022). However, this policy was not implemented until October 2022 when CBN announced the redesigning of the currency which was said to be in the best interest of Nigerians. According to the former Governor of CBN, Godwin Emefiele, this will check terrorism financing, counterfeiting and imbalances in fiscal space as well as to enable the apex bank to take full control of the currency in circulation (Onwuka, 2023).

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) introduced a new policy on cash-based transactions which stipulates a cash handling charge on daily cash withdrawals that exceed N500, 000 for individuals and N3, 000,000 for corporate bodies in

2012. The new policy on cash-based transactions (withdrawals) in banks, aims at reducing (Not Eliminating) the amount of physical cash (coins and notes) circulating in the economy, and encouraging more electronic-based transactions (payments for goods, services, transfers, etc) (Giwa, 2023). The pilot was run in Lagos State from January 2012 while the policy took effect in Rivers, Anambra, Abia, Kano, Ogun and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) on the 1st July, 2013. The policy was implemented nationwide on July 1st, 2014. The service charge took effect from March 30th, 2012, this gave people time to migrate to electronic channels and experience the infrastructure that has been put in place. Banks were to use this period as grace to encourage their customers to migrate to available electronic channels, and where possible, demonstrate the costs that will accrue to those that continue to transact high volumes of cash from March 30th, 2012 in Lagos State (CBN, 2019).

The new cash policy was introduced for a number of key reasons, including:

1. To drive development and modernization of our payment system in line with Nigeria's vision 2020 goal of being amongst the top 20 economies by the year 2020. An efficient and modern payment system is positively correlated with economic development, and is a key enabler for economic growth.
2. To reduce the cost of banking services (including cost of credit) and drive financial inclusion by providing more efficient transaction options and greater reach.
3. To improve the effectiveness of monetary policy in managing inflation and driving economic growth (CBN, 2023).

Before then, studies have also shown that Nigerians are overburdened with the cash transactions. Echekoba and Ezu (2012) in their research on Nigeria's cashless policy, observed that 68.2% of the respondents complained about long queues in the bank, 28% complained of bad attitude of teller officers (cashiers) while 2.89% complained of long distance to bank locations to their home or workplace. Likewise, another research by CBN in December 2011, showed that 51% withdrawal done in Nigeria was through automated teller machine (ATM), while 33.6% was through over the counter (OTC), cash withdrawals and cheque 13.6%. Payment was also done through point of sale machine (POS) which accounted for 0.5% and web 1.3%. Thus, the cashless economy policy of the CBN is designed to provide mobile payment services, breakdown the traditional barriers hindering financial inclusion of millions of Nigerians and bring low cost, secure and convenient financial services to urban, semi – urban and rural areas across the country.

In 2022, CBN expressed the scarcity of the currency due to high volume of the naira kept outside the banking system and attributed that it would have been hoarded by politicians and announced its currency redesign which was launched in December, 2022 (Ume-Ezeoke, 2022). As a result of this currency redesign, in December 6, 2022, CBN also announced the maximum cash withdrawal limit through the Automated Teller Machines (ATM) and Point of

Sale (POS) agents at twenty thousand naira (NGN20,000.00) only per day for individuals subject to one hundred thousand naira (NGN100,000.00) only per week. And one hundred thousand naira (NGN100, 000.00) only per day for corporate entities subject to five hundred thousand naira (NGN500, 000.00) only per week, instructing commercial banks to load only denominations of two hundred naira (NGN200.00) and below into the ATMs (Onwuka, 2023). This marked the beginning of the journey of Nigerians into the cashless society. January 29, 2023 was fixed for the deadline of the use old currency (Itsibor, 2022 & The Cable, 2022).

Thus, Nigerians were forced to deposit their old currency in the banks even when there were no new ones available in the banks for a swap. Long queues at ATM galleries became common place. The agents, bankers or POS machines who are one of the major channels for distributing the new notes to the public charge exorbitantly thereby, dissuading the masses from using these channels. Nigerians flood the ATMs which happen to be the only available option to get the new notes, to beat the short deadline (Onwuka, 2023). As a result of the above, a new mode of business transaction emerged which is quite different from what the people are used to. Every monetary transaction has to go through the digital platform. This also created its own peculiar problem as the network became congested, making most transactions not successful. Even Banks experienced this difficulty in transaction. Point of Sale (POS) operators whose business is mostly owned by bank managers utilized the opportunity to make millions from the masses. They obtain the cash from the banks and sell it to their customers at 50% interest instead of the normal 5% or at most 10% interest. These activities crippled businesses especially the small and middle scale businesses. People in the rural and semi-urban areas were most affected they do not have savings or bank account.

This study therefore examined the gains and pains of this cashless policy on the people of Akwete Ndoki community of Abia State, Nigeria. In order to achieve this, the study will interrogate the people's perception of the new mode of business transactions, identify the advantages and disadvantages of Nigeria's cashless policy on the people and proffer practical suggestions on how to reduce the pains experienced by the people of Akwete Ndoki community of Abia State because of the new mode of business transaction.

Advantages of cashless society

Infowars.com recorded that the main advantage of a cashless society is that it records all economic transactions through electronic means thereby making it almost impossible to sustain underground economies that often prove damaging to national economies. It further stated that it is also riskier to conduct criminal transactions or avoid the proper payment of due taxes in a cashless society, such violations are likely to be greatly reduced (Infowars.com updated, 2020).

Morgan (2023) in the same vein, noted that one major advantage of going cashless is a significant reduction in crime. That is when people are handling

less cash, bank robberies, burglaries and corruption drop. This is because cash is essentially untraceable, it's a useful tool for criminals, where digital currency is less easy to exploit, and can be shut down quickly if it falls into the wrong hands. Advances such as biometrics where individual physical and behavioural characteristics are measured and analyzed made copying and fraud increasingly difficult. The report further stated that, innovations such as embedded microchips, NFC (Near Field Communication) technology, AVS (Address Verification Service), digital wallets, geo-location and artificial intelligence payment systems will all continue to strengthen security around cashless transactions (Morgan, 2023).

Supporters of cashless transactions also point to greater ease in the everyday management of money, for individuals and businesses. The need to store, protect, withdraw and deposit physical money disappears. International travel would also be more convenient without the exchange of paper currencies. The increase of cashless payments during the pandemic is also a legitimate advantage in the long term. It entails less physical contact in the everyday economy minimizes the potential for future pandemics to gain traction (Writer, 2020).

Disadvantages of cashless society

A cashless society would not be good for everyone. According to the Access to Cash report, published before the pandemic in 2019, up to one in five British citizens could be left behind by a transition to digital-only transactions. Elderly people may be less comfortable with technology and less able to make the switch from physical currency. Not only that, rural communities could also be left vulnerable, because of poor internet and mobile connectivity. People with low income or debt tend to find cash easier to manage (Access to Cash Report, 2019).

Another potential disadvantage concerns security. Although abandoning cash helps to reduce theft and fraud, for many consumers, data and cyber security issues are a great worry with justification. Threats from organized cyber-criminals are very real, and they frequently find new ways of breaching established security systems. During the pandemic, many more people made online and mobile purchases, and data breaches increased to match. A concern closely linked to security is privacy. Identity theft and compromised personal information are potential dangers in a cashless economy, but privacy might be compromised in other ways too. When you pay digitally, you always leave a digital footprint, and this footprint is easily monitored by financial institutions. Understandably, consumers are uneasy about their data being harvested or tracked by big businesses.

Many people also feel that cashless spending is more difficult to control. It's simply too easy to overspend when you're not looking at a finite, physical sum of money in your wallet or purse, so careful budgeting becomes important. Beyond individual consumers, the cashless society could also prove costly for small businesses.

Most credit card and mobile payments attract up to three per cent processing charge, which will quickly eat into small profit margins, making it hard for independent shops and small-scale specialist outlets. In an unpredictable world, there is always a concern about system vulnerability. How resilient is the technology that supports a cashless society? Issues like natural disasters or even large-scale cyber-attacks could render entire financial systems useless, preventing people from accessing their money or buying what they need. In this scenario, the old fashioned, physical quality of cash seems reassuring.

Theoretical orientation

This study was anchored on Modernization theory. Modernization theory is an American sociological theory developed by the following scholars: Marion J. Levy Jr., Gabriel Almond, Seymour Martin Lipset, Walt Rostow, Daniel Lerner, Lucian Pye, David Apter, Alex Inkeles, Cyril Edwin Black, Bert F. in 1945 (Singer, 1971). The essential concept of the theory is that every society will go through stages of progression until they reach an ideal stage. The general structure of modernization theory states that all societies progress over time from one stage to another. The ultimate goal of all societies will be to become a modern or post-modern society. The mainstream sociological model of modernization supposes that Western capitalist societies provide the model for modernization.

However, some theories, such as Marxist modernization, do not use Western societies or capitalism as a goal. The varied theories of modernization have been strongly criticized, as has the general concept of modernization. Many sociologists, most of whom studied in the United States, contributed to the creation of modernization theory. It is still a widespread and powerful concept in sociology. Developing stages include traditional society (agricultural), take-off (industrialization), and maturation (increase in technology use) (Zevin, 1972 & Tipps, 1973). However, scholars argue that individual modernization does not come about in a highly consistent way because most people change profoundly in some dimensions while remaining extremely traditional in other respects (Harrison, 1988 & Eisenstadt, 1966).

Some mixed characteristics are quite common because people are not born modern but are made so through their practical life experiences. It is posited that in most individuals, modernity is in fact, a general syndrome rather than a mere collection of discrete elements such that having a composite of modern characteristics, such as modern technology would quite regularly be associated with manifesting of other modern characteristics like favouring the use of ICT and participating in ICT training programmes. Most people do not use ICT facilities because they are ignorant of such services. For instance, individuals who are computer literate are more comfortable with the cashless policy than individuals with little or no computer knowledge. Thus, the scientifically

oriented are more likely to be in accord with new developments and innovations than the less scientifically oriented.

Materials and methods

The study was conducted in Akwete Ndoki community in Abia State Nigeria. Akwete is the Local Government Headquarter of Ukwa-East local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria. It is bounded on the East by Ohanso, on the West by Asa, on the North by Nkporobu and by the south by the Imo river (Ndoki waterside) popularly known as Ndoki harbor. Ndoki people originated from Umu Ihueze Iclan in Umuosi, and Ndoki communities in the present day Rivers State. According to their traditional history, a son of King Ihueze in Umuosi saw a mass piece of land across the Ndoki River as he was tapping palm wine. He saw the land as a good place for habitation, so he took permission from his father to settle across the river with his family. They were the first settlers in Akwete and were known as Umu ihueze 11 clan.

Their system of government is monarchy. Most indigenes of Akwete are civil servants mostly because of the early contact with the colonial masters. However, their indigenous occupation include, long distant trading, fishing and trading while the women weave the Akwete cloth (George, 1982). Akwete is known in West Africa and all over the globe for its unique weaving (Davis, 1974). Akwete has a population of 333,999 (NPC, 2006). This community was chosen for this study because it possesses the features of both rural and urban settlements. Akwete houses the local government secretariat, the Anglican (Bishop) Cathedral, Catholic Church, Local government Police Headquarter, Community Primary School (CPS) Akwete, Secondary Technical College Akwete and an ultra-modern market (Ahia Eke Akwete). However, Akwete does not have good roads, pipe burn water, regular electricity, bank or a functional Post Office.

A cross-sectional survey was conducted using online Google form. The forms were distributed to literate adults aged 18 and above resident in Akwete Ndoki at the time of the research. The study population was made up of all the men, women and SS3 students of Secondary Technical College who has internet access in their home through cellular phone reception, although signal may fluctuate. The researchers through the President General, got access to the different whatsapp group of the men and women groups in the Anglican, men and women groups of the Roman Catholic Church and through the Principal of Secondary Technical College Akwete got access to the whatsapp group of SS3 students. In the secondary school, only SS3 students were considered the take part in the survey. This is because it was assumed that they all have an android phone which they used to generate they profile code for JAMB registration. Also, among the SS3 students, only those that are 18 years and above were eligible to fill the form.

Ten (10) in-depth interview was conducted on ten individuals namely, the President General, a man and a woman leader in the community, a man and a woman leader in the Anglican Church, a man and a woman leader in the

Roman Catholic church, the Principal of Secondary Technical College Akwete, the head boy and head girl of the college. The IDI was conducted via phone calls at the convenience of the participants. The outcome measures were the proportion of persons who in one way or the other were affected by the Nigerian cashless policy.

Quantitative data were collected using a self-administered electronic questionnaire. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected electronically. A Google form containing the study questions and response facilities was developed. The link to the form was then copied and sent to all the selected groups for the study in their different WhatsApp groups. Through this process, the link was well-distributed across the community, reaching different categories of people in the community, thus allowing interested members to respond. Data were collected for 30 days, from 2nd March, 2023 to 31 March, 2023 and were analyzed using frequency distribution and descriptive analysis.

Findings

Only 304 of the survey responses were returned and were used for analysis.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Sex		
Male	192	63.16
Female	112	36.84
Total	304	100
Educational Qualification		
No formal Education	5	1.64
Primary Education	74	24.35
Post Primary Education	198	65.13
Tertiary Education	27	8.88
Total	304	100
State of Origin		
Abia	218	71.71
Anambra	16	5.26
Ebonyi	2	0.66
Enugu	12	3.94
Imo	56	18.43
Total	304	100
Marital status		
Single (never married)	102	33.55
Married	150	49.34
Separated	20	6.58
Widow/Widower	23	10.53
Total	304	100
Occupation		
Civil Servants	122	40.13
Traders	80	26.32
Farmers	16	5.32
Fishermen/women	4	1.32
Students	82	26.97
Total	304	100

Table 1 showed that 63.16% of the respondents were male while the rest were female. The respondent’s educational qualification showed that 1.64% had no formal education 24.35% had primary education 65.13% had post primary education while 8.88% had tertiary education. All the respondents are Nigerians 100.00% and from southeast Nigeria. Up to 71.71% of respondents are from Abia State, 18.43% are from Imo state, 5.26% are from Anambra state, 3.94% are from Enugu state and 0.66% are from Ebonyi state. Most of the respondents are married 49.34%, 10.53% are widows/widowers, 6.58% are separated while 33.55% are single (never married). The occupational statuses of the respondents are as follows: civil servants 40.13%, traders 26.32, farmers 5.32%, fishermen/women 1.32% and students 26.97 %.

Table 2: Akwete Ndoki people’s perception of the new mode of business transaction

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Bad and stressful	198	65.13
Good and desirable	106	34.87
Total	304	100

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents 65.13% perceive the new mode of business transaction as being bad and stressful while 34.87% stated that it is good and desirable. This result collaborates with the qualitative data. One of the IDI participants noted that:

This period is worse than COVID. During COVID, it is only movement that was restricted but now, everything is at stand still, traders don’t have money to buy goods, people don’t have money to buy food and drivers don’t have money to buy fuel. So, we are all sitting at home waiting for death to come and take us home. No food, no money, how do you want me to like the new mode of business transaction. *(72 years Christian women leader, farmer)*

Another IDI participant had this to say:

I don’t like this mode of business transaction because this is not what we are used to. People who are used to it may like it, not people like me. I am a trader and I have lost so much of my goods because of this mode of business transaction. People will come to buy something from you and they will tell you that they will transfer the money. When they transfer, the money will not come into my account. If you go to bank, they will ask you to fill forms, that it is network. My sister, some they corrected others they did not correct. *(43years female trader)*

Another IDI participant noted that:

There is nothing wrong with a society going cashless. It is a global principle. But Nigeria made a big mistake. They did not prepare the citizen before implementation. So, what do you expect, catastrophe- as we are experiencing today. Everybody is suffering. (42years male Civil Servant)

Table 3: Advantages of Nigeria's cashless policy on the people of Akwete Ndoki community

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
It has advantages	56	18.43
It makes people to spend less	27	8.88
It reduces the activities of thieves/robbers	198	65.13
Don't Know	23	7.56
Total	304	100

Table 3 shows that some of the respondents 18.43% admitted that the Nigeria's cashless policy has advantages. Some also accepted that it makes people to spend less 8.88% and reducing the activities of robbers because there is no money to steal 65.13%. Some of the IDI participants also supported the quantitative data.

One of the IDI participants noted that:

Cashless policy makes everybody to be financially disciplined. It makes you to spend money only when it is necessary because you have in your disposal limited cash. (32 years female civil servant)

Another IDI participant said:

This cashless thing is good. It had made our young men and women to stay at home in the evening. Some young men leave their young family and go out to drink with their girlfriends instead of bonding with their families. I like it ooo, I like it. (68years male Community leader, trader)

Another IDI participant said that

This thing that is happening now is very good; it made people to value each other. You can go to someone's house and beg for food and he will gladly give you without asking questions (40year old female farmer)

Table 4: Disadvantages of Nigeria’s cashless policy on the people of Akwete Ndoki community

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
It caused death	102	33.5
It caused depression	42	10.53
It caused hunger	140	46.05
It caused sickness	20	6.58
Total	304	100

The respondents also acknowledged that the Nigeria’s cashless policy has disadvantages and not so much positive features. The reason for the above assertion is because of increase in the number deaths recorded since February 2023, 33.55%, hunger 46.05%, depression 10.53% and sickness 6.58%. This result is in line with the IDI responses.

One of the IDI participants noted that:

There is nothing good in cashlessness. If you don’t have money, you are finished. Hunger is killing a lot of families now. In my house I don’t know the magic my wife uses to put food on the table. If you are sick, you can’t go to hospital or even to go to chemist and buy drugs. What type of life is that? Please if you know anyone in Government, tell them that the people are suffering. (52 years male, farmer)

Another IDI participant said that:

Money is everything in life. If you don’t have money, you are nothing. Even bible said it, “Money answers all things” if you can’t feed your family, you are not a man. Look at me, I have been paid my salary but I cannot collect my money. I have gone to Aba two times but I did not get kobo. And I paid three thousand naira transport to get to First bank at Aba.

Researcher (Probe): Are there no Banks at Akwete?

No, my sister, no banks. You either go to Aba or Port Harcourt. And to get to these two places you pay at least three thousand to four thousand naira transport fare. And I tell you, there is no grantee that you will even get the money. I have gone to Aba two times; I did not get shishi. This can put someone into depression. POS is a no-go area, they can’t give you more than twenty thousand naira and they collect five hundred naira for every one thousand naira you withdraw. (53 years male, civil servant)

Another IDI participant also said that:

I have lost both goods and money. People come to buy things on credit, especially the elderly men and women and they will tell you that their children in the city will transfer the money to you. Sometimes when they transfer the money you will not get it. Also, if I don't record my debtors immediately, I can forget it and that one will go. We are really suffering. (43years female trader)

Coping Strategies adopted by the people of Akwete Ndoki community as a result of the cashless policy

Table 5: Coping strategies adopted by the people of Akwete Ndoki community

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Collect money from the church	218	71.71
Stock food stuff in the house	56	18.43
Exchange goods for goods	12	3.94
Exchange goods for services	16	5.26
Begging	2	0.66
Total	304	100

In order to survive the hard times created by the Nigerian cashless policy, most people collect money from the church after tithes and offerings had been paid 71.71%, some people stocked their houses with food stuff 18.43%, exchanging goods for goods 3.94%, exchanging goods for services 5.26%, begging 0.66%. These quantitative responses collaborated with the qualitative data. One of the IDI participants noted that:

I am close to my pastors' family because the wife is my elder sister, so after offering, we collect cash from the church and transfer the equivalent to the church account. It is not only us other church members also collect. (18 years female student)

Another IDI participant also said that:

There are so many things' people do to cope at this period. For me, before 29 January, I used all the money I have to buy enough food stuff. Even though that is not the solution to the problem, but it helped me because I have small children and they must eat. Some people resolved to trade by barter, that is if you give me yam, I will give you beans or whatever you don't have in exchange. Others visit houses and either wash, sweep the compound or even cook for the owner of the house and they will be given food or money in exchange. People also beg. In short

begging is a common thing in the community now. People are no longer ashamed to beg. (32 years female civil servant)

Practical Solutions to the problems faced by the people of Akwete Ndoki community as a result of the cashless policy

Table 6: Solutions to the problems faced by the people of Akwete Ndoki community

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Banks should build Branch in the community	122	40.13
More people should operate POS stands	82	26.97
Government should enlighten the people on cashless policy	80	26.32
Government should do money swap in the rural areas	16	5.26
The people should ICT literate	4	1.32
Total	304	100

The respondents suggested that banks should build their branches in Ndoki communities 40.13%, more people should start operating POS 26.97%, Government should prepare the citizens before introducing the policy 26.32%, Government should do money swap in all rural areas 5.26%, people should be ICT literate 1.32%. These responses collaborated with the qualitative data. One of the IDI participants noted that:

If there were two or three branches of banks in Akwete, the people will not be suffering like this. Even if it is just pay points not full branch, let them come and build. Secondly let government come and do this cash swap they are doing in the northern part of the country for the rural areas in the south east as well. We are not different; we are also citizens. (53 years male, civil servant)

Another IDI participant noted that:

If the people are computer literate, they will not be suffering like that. Some people have ATM cards, but they don't know how to use it, most people don't know how to do mobile transfer. So, if everybody is computer literate cashless policy will not be a problem. (18 years male student)

One of our participants also stated that:

Government needs to properly educate the citizens before introducing any policy. Especially something like this cashless

policy which is a very sensitive issue. If the people were properly enlightened, it would have reduced the suffering on the citizens and they will be able to cope until the time they will see the benefits of this policy. (18 years female student)

Discussion of findings

This study showed that though Awkete is a Local Government Headquarter, the community has the features of rural and urban setting. It has the Divisional Headquarter of the Nigerian Police, the Heads of the Anglican and Catholic Churches, an Ultra-modern market, yet it does not have a single bank. One of the participants in the study stated that it costs three to four thousand naira (NGN3, 000.00 to NGN4, 000.00) to get to the nearest bank to the community. All the respondents are from the South Eastern States of Nigeria. Some of the respondents 18.43% admitted that the Nigeria's cashless policy has advantages. According to the IDI participants, it makes people to spend less and reduces the incidence of crime in the society. This finding is in line with Morgan (2023) thoughts that one major advantage of going cashless is a significant reduction in crime. The report further stated that when people are handling less cash, bank robberies, burglaries and corruption drop. The participants also said that going cashless make people to place high value on life as someone can walk into a neighbour's house and beg for food.

However, a majority of them 71.71% noted that the Nigeria's cashless policy has many disadvantages such as increase in the number deaths recorded since February 2023 33.55%, hunger 49.34%, depression 10.53% and sickness 6.58%. One of the IDI participants complained of losing so much money due to poor network associated with money transfer. She also complained of losing goods especially if she did not record her debtors immediately. They also stated that the few POS operators charge exorbitantly and operates at their convenience. According to one of our IDI participants, 'POS is a no-go-area'.

Notwithstanding, the people adopted coping strategies to survive the financial hardship created by the Nigerian cashless policy which includes collecting money from the church after tithes and offerings had been paid. This good-will services are limited to core members of the said denominations. Stocking their houses with food stuff before the deadline for the use of old currency, this strategy only has a very short term benefit, because the food will eventually finish after some times. Exchange of goods for goods or goods for services. This particular exchange of goods for goods is rather quite different from the unique trade by barter system practiced at the Esuk Mba community market in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State. There is an age-long barter trade system for food items. In Akpabuyo community in Cross River State, Nigeria, people pay for what they need with what they have, instead of using coins and banknotes. They say it's a part of their cultural heritage which they have the obligation to preserve (Ogbonna, 2023). Here people go with what they have to see if anyone needs it in exchange for something else. People also visit homes to do domestic works in exchange for

food stuff or money. Finally, some people resorted to outright begging which is not a predominant practice in south east Nigeria. It is true that the cashless policy is a global practice and may have a long-term benefit, the immediate effects on the people living in Akwete Ndoki community is pain and anguish.

Limitations of the study

This study is limited to Akwete Ndoki community and the findings are therefore limited to this population. There could also be the bias due to the qualitative and quantitative nature of the analysis employed in this study as well as the potential selection bias as some participants who had no or weak internet connectivity may have been excluded.

Conclusion

The motivation for this study was that Akwete Ndoki is a Local Government Headquarter which has both state and federal government presence like the Local Government secretariat and Divisional Headquarters of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), the community still have features of a core rural area. For instance, the community does not have a bank, ICT complex or business centers and no electricity power supply even though there are electric poles. This has adversely affected the digital literacy of the members of the community. Thus, hindering modernization. The community has about eight (8) POS stands which the owners operate at their own convenience. The findings of this study showed that Akwete Ndoki people have more negative (65.13%) perception of the new mode of business than positive (43.87%) perception. This low level of positive perception has implications for the larger Nigerian society, particularly the rural and semi-rural populace who will obviously look up to the Local Government Headquarter community as a reference.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the followings:

- The bodies regulating banks should mandate that, banks should build their branches in every Local Government Area in Nigeria.
- Computer literacy enlightenment programme should be brought down to the grass root.
- Transition from full cash to cashless society should be a gradual process.

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