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► **To cite this version:**

Junaidu Danladi. The Economic Impact Of Covid-19 Pandemic On Kano, Nigeria. [Research Report] IFRA-Nigeria Working Papers Series 80, IFRA-Nigeria. 2021, pp.1-31. hal-03416168

**HAL Id: hal-03416168**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03416168>**

Submitted on 5 Nov 2021

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IFRA-Nigeria

WORKING PAPERS SERIES

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80 | JULY 31, 2021

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# THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON KANO, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

The advent of Covid-19 in Nigeria in the early 2020 posed serious challenges or setback to Kano's business environment. In order to curtail the spread of the virus various policies were introduced that include suspension of international air flight, closed down of all country's borders, inter-state movement restrictions, imposition of lockdown order in many states and closure of markets. The implementation of these policies in most cases are counter-productive; as they did not prevent the movement of people with possible implication of transmitting the virus. The markets were closed for about two months which happened during the annual trading boom, when most the traders used to record the highest transactions due to increase in demand. These policies resulted to the disruption of trading networks and prevented the flow of goods and services. Of course, this situation affected different categories of traders, but most affected are the small-scale traders, vendors, hawkers, transporters, food and sachet water vendors that depended on these markets for daily earnings. The immediate impacts of these policies include galloping inflation that cut across all categories of goods and services, loss of income and capital, shortage of goods supply, low transactions, poverty and unemployment. Expectedly, traders adopted different survival strategies at least to reduce or leverage severe impact of the pandemic. These strategies comprise the use of online trading, road sites trading, and increasing patronage of supermarkets as alternative to the conventional markets.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, lockdown, inflation, markets, online trading, hawking, supermarket.

# Introduction

Kano located in the north western part of Nigeria is one of the most densely populated states in Nigeria with an estimated population of over 15 million people. For centuries, Kano has been one of the major commercial and industrial centres in Africa. It has been connected with various trade networks that transcends to major trading centres in Africa and beyond. With the establishment of British colonial over rule, Kano emerged as the premier city of northern Nigeria, and became a major commercial centre essentially for the bulking and shipping of groundnut, cotton and cattle (Forest, 1994). This trade was championed by some European multi-national corporations, while many Lebanese and local traders became their buying agents. 1960 marked the transition from British rule to Nigerians which paved way for the Nigerian to take over economic control especially in retail trading and light industries. However, foreign interests continued to play significant role in Kano's economy. Thus, Kano remain the major commercial and industrial centre in northern Nigeria. Almost all the states in the north depend on Kano for the supply of various goods. The state contained at least 10 international markets that are distributing both locally manufactured and imported goods. In addition, there are hundreds of supermarkets and community stores scattered across the metropolis. Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly seriously affected the economic development of Kano. The work focuses on the impact of Covid-19 on small-scale traders, hawkers and customers. The research mostly conducted on Kano metropolis where all the major markets are located. This report is an outcome a research conducted on the impact of Covid-19 on Kano's economy especially on the economic and lives of small-scale traders, hawkers and vendors. The pandemic necessitated the adoption of some politics aimed at curtailing the spread of the virus. These policies or measures had direct impact on the economic lives of traders in Kano. The report covers the immediate impact of first phase Covid-19 covering the period from April to December, 2020. And the data collected in this research would be very useful in understanding the economic impact of Covid-19 in Nigeria. Extant studies have analysed the impact of Covid-19 on the Nigeria's economic development. Kwaw Andam *et al.* (2020) analyzed the economic impact of Covid-19 pandemic and the policies implemented to curtail the spread of the virus in Nigeria. The report focuses on the impact of lockdown policy implemented by both federal and states in various states in Nigeria including Lagos, Kano, Ogun and Kaduna. Chibueze, O.O. *et al.* (2020)

discussed the impact of Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown order implemented in Nigeria. It was observed that lockdown had adverse effects on individuals, households, micro, small and medium scale enterprises, and large corporations. Danladi (2015 and 2019) studies Kano's business environment pointing out that Kano as a leading commercial in Africa had an annual period of trade boom, when most of the traders recorded highest transactions. However, in 2020, the annual trade boom was shattered by the outbreak Covid-19 that necessitated the closure of most of the markets in Kano. Therefore this paper using the extant literature and oral information analyzes the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic in Kano.

## **Methodology**

The research used both primary and secondary data using qualitative and quantitative methods. The data used comprise oral interviews, newspapers, pictures, videos, government presses and reports. The research involved the extensive field work in Kano metropolis. In the process of data collection, a number of informants were interviewed. All the interviews were recorded using mobile handset and note taking methods jotting down the major points. A simple set of questions were drafted to serve as sort of guide during the interviews. The informants ranged from trader's union leaders, traders and customers. The informants were met mostly in their business premises in the markets such as Kantin Kwari, Sabon Gari, Dawanau, Yankaba and Singer. The interviews were conducted in Hausa language, the predominant language speak by the informants. This necessitated transcription and analysis of all the interviews. The data collected during the project included oral data collected through interviews with relevant informants, government documents, pictures, videos, newspapers that comprised the national dailies and special radio programs. In addition, available relevant reports were used to argument the data collected during the research project. The Covid-19 pandemic triggered many researches aimed at finding out the major consequences of the pandemic on various sectors such as education, healthcare, society and of course economy.

# The outbreak of Covid-19 and its impact on Kano's Business Environment

The emergence of Covid-19 in Kano led to the implementation of some preventive policies by various stakeholders such as federal, state, local government have affected trading activities. Basically, we can categorize traders into three: small, medium and major traders. All these traders were affected by the severe impact of Covid-19, but the first category was the worst hit because they solely relied on daily earnings for their survival. Most of the markets in Kano metropolis traded both imported and locally products and attracted traders from other area. As result, they were seriously affected by the policies introduced. Some of the policies comprise suspension of international and local flights, border closure, inter-state and intra-state movement restriction, lockdown order. These resulted to the disruption of local and international trader networks that hindered import and export leading to hyperinflation.

## *Suspension of international and local flights:*

As a result of Covid-19 pandemic there was closure of all airports in Nigeria for international and local flights this has seriously affect both import and export trade. The countries affected include China, United Arabs Emirate (Dubai), United States of America, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Saudi Arabia. These countries are major Nigeria's trading partners that supplied goods to Nigerian markets including Kano. Therefore, there was disruption of goods importation from these countries. Meanwhile, some Kano traders became stranded in other countries in their quest to import goods.<sup>1</sup> Related to this is the banning of international pilgrims to perform both *Umrah* (lesser hajj) and pilgrimage (*hajj*) by the authority of Saudi Arabia. For centuries, thousands of pilgrims travelled to Saudi Arabia for annual *hajj*. However, in June 2020, the Saudi authority announced the banning of international pilgrims to participate in the exercise due to the prevalence of Covid-19. Only few Saudi residents were allowed to partake in this important exercise. Although *hajj* is primarily a religious rite, it also entails economic drain for many people. It provides sources of income to many people such as travel agents, airlines, transporters, food vendors and other traders. In addition, many pilgrims especially regular ones use

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Hausa Service interview with Rab'u Abdullahi-export and import trader on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2020

the period of *hajj* for trading purposes to export and import goods sometimes including illegal goods like drug trafficking.<sup>2</sup> Few others engaged in an unholy act of human trafficking.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Borders' closure:*

With the increasing spread of Covid-19, Nigeria's international borders were closed down. This has prevented the influx of traders from the neighboring countries of Niger, Mali, Chad, Cameroun, Ghana and Togo from attending Kano markets. As indicated earlier, in Kano there are many international markets that are attended on daily basis by traders from these countries.

#### *Paradox of Lockdown:*

In order to contain the spread of Covid-19 in Nigeria, the federal government first imposed lockdown in Abuja, Lagos and Ogun states in March 2020. Between April and July, the lockdown was later extended to other states such as Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Borno, Akwa Ibom, Ekiti, Kwara, Jigawa, Osun, Rivers and Taraba. Lockdown had restricted the movement of people, goods and services across the country resulting to huge economic losses. It was estimated that during the lockdown period Nigeria's GDP suffered a 34.1 percent loss due to Covid-19, amounting to USD 16 billion, with two-third of the losses coming from the services sector (Kwaw Andam *et al.*2020) Lockdown and interstate movement restriction throughout the country had interrupted the flow of goods and services which affected commercial activities in Kano.

Meanwhile, during the lockdown there was stigmatization of Kano as it was perceived by many states in the north as the 'Wuhan' or epicenter of transmitting the virus to other neighboring states. Perhaps that was due to the high number of the virus cases recorded in the state and its strategic position as commercial

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the economy of Hajj, read, O. E. Tangban (1991) "The Hajj and the Nigerian Economy 1960-1981" *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 21, issue 3. p. 254. J. Miran (2015) "Stealing the Way to Mecca: West African Pilgrims and the Illicit Red Sea Passes, 1920s-50s" *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 56, No. 3. pp. 389-408.

<sup>3</sup> F. Abdullahi (2019) "Unholy Acts in the Holy Land: Exploring the Trends of Human Trafficking and Enslavement of Nigerians in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" in A.B. Sani and I. M. Jumare (eds.) *Studies in Slavery across Africa: Experiences and Modern Resurgence*, Katsina: Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Press.

centre that attract people from different parts of the world. At least two videos found out showed how traders in Bauchi and Yobe were barred from visiting Kano during the lockdown. However, despite the banning and all odds, traders never stopped coming to Kano to buy consumer goods that were not available in their respective areas.

In the first video, the Governor of Bauchi Bala Mohammed barred Bauchi traders from coming to Kano markets during the lockdown

“Our traders should not go to Kano, people of Kano from should not come to Bauchi for the next two weeks. The same applied to Yobe, Gombe and Plateau states. We should continue with prayers so that I will be the only person in the state to be infected by the virus...We would not totally closed down the state...”<sup>4</sup>

In the second video which was widely circulated in social media there was a public announcement in Yobe State mandating traders that attended Kano markets to report for Corona test:

...Here is an announcement the amalgamated traders association wish to inform all the traders and their drivers that visited Kano yesterday that they should not intermingle with people and report to the health officials to check their health status/condition. Furthermore, anybody who know that his neighbor, or a wife that know her husband visited Kano should not interact with them....<sup>5</sup>

A trader discloses that many traders from outside state had suspended coming to due to the fear of infecting with the Corona virus because it was perceived as a major transmission centre:

“...Kano trade was threatened by the Corona pandemic. There was a lot of stigma against Kano. Kano was seen by many people as epicenter of Corona virus. And people need their lives more than anything. This has forced many traders to stop coming to Kano

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<sup>4</sup> This video in Hausa was shared in WhatsApp in May 2020. I downloaded it in June 2020 during the data collection phase of this project. I have tried to find a link to the video but I could not get. However, it is part of data I submitted to IFRA-Nigeria.

<sup>5</sup> This video in Hausa was shared in WhatsApp in May 2020. I downloaded it in June 2020 during the data collection phase of this project. I have tried to find a link to the video but I could not get. However, it is part of data I submitted to IFRA-Nigeria.



especially during lockdown. In addition, many traders have lost their capital during the lockdown. Only those that were lucky enough to have some capital to continue with business after the reopening of markets.”<sup>6</sup>

In Kano, the implementation of lockdown necessitated the suspension of commercial activities in the major markets. For about two months all the major markets were closed down except two markets that were allowed to operate during the lockdown free days. These are Naibawa fruits market and Yankaba vegetable market. Many people questioned the government wisdom of allowing these markets to operate, while all the markets including those dealing with foodstuffs were closed. Perhaps according to the Chairman of Yankaba vegetable market the importance of their products in curing and preventing of Coronavirus was the major reasons for allowing them to continue to operate despite the closure of other markets.

“It was even said that some of our products like ginger, green pepper, carrot could serve as a cure to Coronavirus. That was why the Kano state government decided to allow traders in Yankaba market to continue even during the critical period of Corona in the state. This has greatly helped our traders to continue with the trade in this market. Fruits and vegetables traders don't have much problem with Corona lockdown.”<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, lockdown and interstate movement restrictions can be counter-productive economically especially as it affect the lives of petty traders. Both measures were implemented in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus, alas, most of the public events continued unchecked in most parts of Kano state during the period without necessarily observing safety measures. Thus, in most cases only trading activities in the markets were prevented, but most of the mass public events especially in the remote areas of the city continued as usual. In addition, despite the implementation lockdown and interstate movement restrictions many traders from other states continued to troop to Kano markets particularly on lockdown-free days. Of course, this was done in collaboration with security

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Usman Shuaibu Hussain a trader at Kantin Kwari Market on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at his shop in Kantin Kwari Market

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Umar Ibrahim, Chairman of Kano State Association of Traders of Fruits, Vegetables and other related Products

personnel stationed on the major roads to ensure compliance with the policy. Also the traders maneuvered their way using the unguarded porous local roads that were not fully covered by the security agents.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1: list of major markets in Kano Metropolis**

S/N	Market	Nature	Year established	Operation
	Kurmi	General goods	1463	Daily
	Sabon Gari	General goods	1918	Daily
	Rimi	General goods	1937	Daily
	Kantin Kwari	Textiles	1933	Daily
	Kwanar Singer	General goods	1946	Daily
	Sharada	General goods	1960	Daily
	Kofar Wambai	General goods	1977	Daily
	Dawanau	Foodstuffs	1985	Daily
	Kofar Ruwa	Vehicle spare parts, building materials	1985	Daily
	Na'ibawa	Timber and Plywood	198	Daily
	'Yankaba	Vegetables	1985	Daily
	Na'ibawa Yanlemo	Fruits	1982	Daily
	Bachirawa	Timber and Plywood	1985	Daily
37	Farm Centre	GSM, electronics	2010	Daily

Source: A. I. Maigari (2014) "Evolutionary Trend, Spatial Distribution of, and issues associated with Markets in Kano Metropolis, in Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol.4, No. 28 (online). pp. 27-28.

Meanwhile, exemption was granted for water producers including sachet and water vendors. Initially, they were not exempted, but after several appeals by

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Usman Shuaibu Hussain a trader at Kantin Kwari Market on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at his shop in Kantin Kwari Market

many concern residents including this writer in social media radio they were exempted because they were considered as part of essential services. The inability of Kano state government for years to provide adequate potable water, most of the residents of Kano metropolis depend on water vendors and sachet water producers for their daily water supply. Thus, within two days of the lockdown, people suffered water shortage which led to several calls for the exemption of water providers.

### *Manufacturing:*

Another important area seriously affected by the Covid-19 pandemic is the manufacturing sector. Most of the manufacturing activities during the lockdown were suspended. The major industries affected include food processor, cement, basic and fabricated metals, plastics, furniture and textiles. This resulted to the low supply of goods in the markets and sudden increase in prices of goods. Many industries were compelled to disengage many of their staff, which greatly contributed to the unemployment pool in the state. More so, it has resulted to the low supply of goods as indicated by this trader:

“As you can observe at the moment no enough goods in our shops, only few goods remained despite the high demand especially as we are on eve of *Sallah* festivities. We are only here idle without adequate goods to distribute to our teaming customers. Since the beginning of Corona pandemic the company suspended production. Even when the company resumed production not quite long, the level of production still remained very low due to some challenges. As result, the company could not meet the growing demand of their customers. I used to receive supply 4 to 5 times weekly from the company, but now for about 2 week no single supply from the company. I have to visit the company as early as 7 am every day, but still, no supply. Government need to intervene in this regard.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Yusuf Dankaka Dorayi, a trader at Muhammad Abubakar Rimi (Sabon Gari) Market

## The role of trader's associations and other stakeholders

Of course trader's associations had played significant after the implementation of lockdown policy that resulted to the closure of market places. Prior to the implementation of lockdown policy trader's associations were not fully involved, unlike the Islamic religious leaders who were duly consulted before closing of mosques. Perhaps this was due to sensitivity of religion in the state. After the closed down of markets, traders formed themselves like pressure groups appealing to government initially for opening of markets during lockdown-free days at least twice weekly. Later they agitated for the total removal of lockdown order so that markets could be reopened.<sup>10</sup> The prominent associations include Amalgamated Traders Welfare Association (AMATA), Kano State Association of Traders of Fruits, Vegetables and other related Products, Kantin Kwari Market Trader's Association and Dawanau International Grains Market Trader's Association. Their efforts led to the marathon meeting between the government and trader's representatives. In the meeting, the Governor of Kano State announced plan to reopen the markets subject to strict observance of Covid-19 prevention protocols such as use of hand sanitizer and social distancing. Subsequently, all markets were reopened for usual commercial activities in early July 2020. On the other hand, many Islamic scholars used their sermons and teaching sessions particularly during the Ramadan fasting to call on both federal and state governments to consider the re-opening of the markets so that consumers could have the opportunity to purchase different goods of their choice. Also, they admonished traders to reduce their prices of their goods in order to reduce the galloping inflation. The traditional leaders under the Emir of Kano did not play apparent role during the period. However, as tradition dictates, they might have advised the relevant authority confidentially without making it public. The Emir of Kano was fully represented in the marathon meeting between the government and trader's representatives that paved way for the re-opening of the markets.

The Covid-19 preventive measures implemented in Kano and other states as provided above had severe impacts on Kano's business environment. The Covid-19 lockdown occurred at the period of annual trade boom in Kano. In Kano, there

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<sup>10</sup> Interviews with Auwalu Kofar Secretary General of Sabon Gari Market Amalgamated Traders Welfare Association (AMATA) on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at Sabon Gari Market and Umar Ibrahim, Chairman of Kano State Association of Traders of Fruits, Vegetables and other related Products

are at least three seasonal trade boom: first, Ramadan fasting to *Eidel Kabeer* (performed in the month of Zhul-Hijjah- between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> months in Islamic Calendar), second, the annual farming harvesting that usually coincided with the time of annual *Maulud* (the period of Prophet Muhammad's birthday) and finally during end of year festivities such as Christmas and New Year. During these period there were usually high demand of consumer goods such as foodstuffs and textiles. This resulted to the high transactions by all categories of traders. Traders from different states of Nigeria and from the neighboring countries visited Kano markets in mass to purchase variety of products.

According to *The Economist*, Africa was among the continent most hit harder by the severe effect of Covid-19 pandemic:

“The pandemic has made it harder to be sunny. When Covid-19 first struck, a lot of pundits thought Africans might be spared the worst, because so many are young or work on the land (and would thus be little affected by lockdown). Yet it now looks as if the virus will leave more lasting scars in Africa than elsewhere... IMF predicts it will be the slowest-growing large region this year. Repeated waves of infection will also disrupt the schooling of millions, putting at risk the educational and demographic trends that are among Africa's best reasons to be hopeful...The greatest harm is likely to come not from the immediate impact of the pandemic, but rather from its lingering effects on economies, households and societies (see Middle East and Africa section). Start with Africa's economies. Before the pandemic, growth was already slowest. Because the region's population is growing by 2.7% a year, about twice the pace of Asia, Africa needs at least much economic expansion merely to stand still. Yet GDP has lagged behind population growth since 2016.”<sup>11</sup>

“Corona has greatly affected our business. It has brought a lot of challenges. Throughout the period of *Ramadan* the market was closed down. But we thank God that now the activities began to resume. In this market we have 3 periods that traders used to record highest transactions: Ramadan, harvesting period and end of year (during Christmas). However, this year's Ramadan came

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<sup>11</sup> *The Economist*, February 6th 2021 p. 7

with Corona (lockdown). Now we can only target harvesting and Christmas period.”<sup>12</sup>

In my earlier study it has been established that traders in Kano recorded highest transaction during the annual trade boom:

“Kantin Kwari market recorded the highest commercial activities during major ceremonies especially *Sallah*. Islamic injunctions recommended the use of new clothes during this period. As a result many people trooped to the market in order to purchase clothes at more affordable prices. This became more possible and practicable because in most cases the period of *Sallah* festivities coincided with the harvesting period when most of the farmers, who constituted bulk of the population, sold some part of their crops in order to meet the essential family needs including clothing. Many traders in the market noted that they recorded highest transactions during ceremonies, which normally started a month to the period. The market also witnessed high transactions during the *Maulud* period. *Maulud* is an annual event celebrated on the third month in the Islamic calendar (*Rabi’al-Awwal*) to commemorate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). During the celebration, many Muslims especially Islamic school (*Islamiyyah*) students used new clothes which had contributed to the high sale of textiles in the market. Many traders stated that they recorded a trade boom during these festive periods.”<sup>13</sup>

However, Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 hit the state during these important seasons. This situation had seriously affected most of the traders in Kano. The closure of markets during the lockdown compelled the traders to stay at homes without going to markets. The adverse effects of this was severe as many traders found it very difficult to feed their mostly large families during the lockdown. A trader laments how Covid-19 affected trading activities in Kano:

“Corona has greatly affected all aspects of our economy. In this market it affect us first in term of international traders and customers that stopped coming to the market. Remember that this

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Nura Idris Maliya is former Public Relation Officer (PRO) of trader's association in Kantin Kwari Market with Arewa Radio 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2020

<sup>13</sup> Danladi, J. (2015), “A History of *Kantin Kwari* Market in Kano C. 1933-2012” unpublished M. A Dissertation, History, Bayero University, Kano. p. 89

market is an international grains market with traders coming from different parts of the world. But due to the Corona pandemic most of our major customers from African countries, Europe and Asia have stopped coming to the market. This has seriously affected the market. Secondly, most of the traders were affected. Many traders especially major dealers have already stored goods in their warehouses, stores, shops and stalls, but there has been low patronage due to the closed down of many countries. You can imagine international market without international traders!...With regard to the small-scale traders, most of them with a capital worth a million naira have been reduced to merely one hundred thousand or one hundred and fifty thousand naira only. Thus, Corona pandemic has a devastating impact on traders. For the major traders, the Corona pandemic appeared/happened during the annual *Ramadan* fasting, when there was usual high demand of foodstuff. But this year there was no trade boom during that important period.”<sup>14</sup>

## Inflation

The immediate impact of the Covid-19 in Kano and indeed through Nigeria is high increase in the prices of goods and services. During the pandemic, Kano state like other parts of the country recorded high inflation. It has been observed that since the beginning of pandemic, there has been growing inflation especially for essential commodities like food items, textiles water, medicines and building materials. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) the inflation rate increased by 13.22 percent in August, up from 12.82 percent recorded in July 2020, being the highest in two years. The CPI report showed that composite food index rose by 16 percent in August compared to 15 percent in July 2020. "This rise in the food index was caused by increases in prices of bread, cereals, potatoes, yam and other tubers, meat, fish; fruits, oils and fats and vegetables".<sup>15</sup>

A BBC-Hausa service report in August 2020 highlights the rate inflation in Kano:

"Presently in Kano locally produced rice is sold between 22,000 and 24,000 naira as against 16,000 naira in January this year (2020).

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed Mota former Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Dawanau International Grains Market Association on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2020

<sup>15</sup> *Daily Trust* September 16, 2020.

How can poor survive in this terrible condition? The inflation is not only in the food items, the prices of other commodities have also been increased. The price of gold has increased significantly. 1 gram of gold has doubled. Unemployment also became the order of the day. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of unemployed is 27, 1000,000 million persons. All these problems that have been highlighted are directly connected with severe impact of Corona pandemic. The growth of Nigerian economy declined by at least 6 percent between May and August as a result of Corona. Now Nigeria has commenced resumption of various economic activities that were suspended as a result of lockdown order imposed. Don't forget Nigerian economy has heavily depended on oil export that continued to decline, the worse since 2017. Nigeria has reduced oil export in order to stabilize the price in line with OPEC regulations. From all indications unemployment would continue until when government fully implement the new economy recovery program. Government has earmarked \$6billion in the critical sectors like agriculture, housing, oil and gas. It is our hope that this effort would succeeded in order to improve current situation."<sup>16</sup>

**Table 2: Inflation rates of some essential commodities in Kano, March-August, 2020**

S/N	Products	Quantity (Kilogram)	Pre-COVID-19 (March, 2020)	During COVID-19 (August, 2020)
1.	Rice (locally produced)	50 kilogram	N15,000	N20,000
2.	Sugar	50kilogram	N16,000	N25,000
3.	Spaghetti	500 gram	N2,800	N4,000
4.	Macaroni	500 gram	N2,800	N4,000
5.	Flour	50 kilogram	N10,000	N13,500
6.	Millet	50 kilogram	N9,000	N17,000
7.	Sorghum	50 kilogram	N9,000	N17,000
8.	Onion	100 kilogram	N6,000	N35,0000

<sup>16</sup> BBC Hausa Special Report on Inflation in Kano by Ummulkhar Musajo August, 2020



9.	Fertilizer (NPK-15-15)	50 kilogram	N7,000	N13,000
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Official data on the rate of inflation as provided by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) is very important in understanding the inflation rate, but then, it is cannot adequately explain the situation of ground. The inflation rate in reality is more than the official figure. In fact, the prices of most of the essential goods have increased between twenty and fifty percent, sometimes by more hundred percent (see table 2 above for specific figure). As indicated earlier the Corona pandemic occurred during the annual trade boom when there was increasing demand of consumer goods resulting to increase in prices. Normally in Kano and other parts of northern Nigeria, traders considered the Ramadan fasting period as a time to increase prices, especially on essential commodities such as foodstuffs and textiles. It was very common during this period of high demand some traders used to hoard and hike or inflate prices of goods during this period. Expectedly, traders in the state took the advantage of Covid-19 lockdown to hoard goods and inflate prices of goods. The situation worsened to an extent that prices of such commodities jumped to over hundred percent within few days of the lockdown and continue to increase almost daily. As a result the general consumers became worried because most items became highly unaffordable to average consumers especially at the time when people were forced to stay at homes due to lockdown. This made many consumers especially low income earners to call on the concerned authorities to intervene in order to ensure price stabilization of consumer goods. Responding to the agitations of the people, the Kano state directed the Kano State Public Complaints and Anti-Corruption Commission to map out modalities to address the issues of artificial inflation. The commission discovered that the major cause of the inflation was not necessarily shortage of goods, but it was a result of the hoarding mostly by the major traders. The commission successfully sealed many warehouses where large stocks of goods were stored. Subsequently, the commission held series of meetings with the leadership of trader's associations in the state, with the view of providing modalities for moderate prices that could be affordable to average consumers. According to the Chairman of the Commission, Muhyi Magaji Rimin Gado:

"During the series of meetings we had with the leadership of these businessmen in Kano, we reached an agreement to reduce the prices of some basic commodities to what we believed would be affordable. For instance, sugar was pegged at N16, 000 per 50kg

bag. We also reached an accord on how to make commodities available to smaller markets across the state, to ensure availability and avoid artificial scarcity."<sup>17</sup>

The commission also met with the Rice Processors Association of Nigeria (RIPAN) to resolve negative consequences of hoarding especially during the Covid-19 lockdown and Ramadan fasting. The result to the signing of agreement which they agreed was that each 50kg of processed rice should not exceed N16, 000 per bag. Before the intervention the price of the same rice was up to N23, 000 in most of the major markets in the state. The commission also succeeded in ensuring that the Association of Table Water Producers of Nigeria reduced the price of sachet water from N120 to N80 per bag (find the full agreement signed attached in appendix I).

This intervention had succeeded in controlling the prices of essential commodities during the lockdown. This effort was applauded by many residents or consumers. A resident of the state, said before government's intervention, people were subjected to great hardship without any justification, as traders determined the prices of their goods without due consideration of living condition of the general consumers. "For many years, traders in this state have been determining the prices of commodities, but Covid-19 lockdown, this year's situation was different as they seized the situation to subject people to unwarranted hardship. Fortunately, the commission was able to determine prices of rice and sugar, otherwise we would have been in pitiful scenario by now". Another customer, said that within the few days, Kano people had a very tough time with prices of commodities. She commended the state government for coming to their rescue, the action had helped in price reduction, and otherwise the state would have experienced the worse inflation ever.<sup>18</sup>

The intervention of the commission was the first time of this kind of government intervention in regulating prices of essential commodities such as rice, sugar and sachet water. Although this intervention was temporary, it has resulted in stabilizing the prices of some essential, at least during the lockdown. However, after the suspension of lockdown, the price of commodities continued to skyrocket. Table 2 provides the rates of inflation of some essential goods.

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<sup>17</sup> *Daily Trust May 23, 2020*

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Trust May 23, 2020*

In addition to Covid-19 other factors caused inflation including hoarding of essential goods by mostly major traders, low supply of goods from the industries, high cost of production, tax increment especially Value Added Tax (VAT) and panic-buying engaged by many traders.

## **Alternative strategies adopted during the lockdown**

The imposition of lockdown order compelled different categories of traders to adopt various alternative strategies in order to mitigate its severe impact. These alternatives include road site hawking, granting supermarkets to operate and expansion of online trading.

### **Road sites hawking as an alternative to the market for traders**

As explained before, the imposition of lockdown resulted in the subsequent closed down of all (major) markets in Kano except two markets that were allowed to operate during the lockdown-free or relaxation days. As an alternative, many traders employed different mechanisms or strategies on how to conduct their businesses. For some traders they normally conduct their businesses 'secretly' at either uncompleted buildings or in residential houses. For the majority of small-scale traders they used to display their goods on the roads around the markets and neighboring residential areas. The major areas occupied included IBB way and residential areas of Fagge. These areas were located close to the major markets such as Kantin Kwari, Sabon Gari and Kofar Wambai markets. Interestingly, many customers trooped to these places to buy essential goods during the lockdown-free hours and during odd hours. Traders from outside Kano State also used to visit Kano markets despite the suspension of inter-state transportation or movement. It was normally done in collaboration with the security agents assigned at the major roads to prevent the movement of people.

It is imperative to mention that street hawking and road sites trading has been an important phenomenon in Kano's business environment. It could be traced to the 1970s, when the saturation of extant markets necessitated some traders mostly small-scale traders to engage in hawking conducted in major public places. Some of the major factors that motivated the proliferation of street hawking include:

- Rapid urbanization and industrialization in Kano from the late 1970s
- Massive migration: local and international migration
- Saturation of the extant markets
- Inability of the petty traders to rent shops due to the high cost of rent of shops and stalls
- Easy accessibility by the customers
- Stress-free to engage in hawking without much formalization
- In ability of government to impose strict laws that prohibited street hawking.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, road site hawking in Kano has predated the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. What was novel is the increasing rate of the hawking due to the closure of markets. The conduct of trading in residential places became a health threat to the people of the areas to the extent that people have to complain to the relevant authorities in order to curtail the spread of Coronavirus. This was because trading activities were conducted without following or observing Covid-19 protocols as we can see in plate 1.



**Plate 1: Trading during lockdown in Kano**

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<sup>19</sup> For further information on street hawking in Kano, check J. Danladi (2019) “Contesting Public Space: Street Hawking in Kano, Nigeria, 1980-2017” paper presented at the Annual Conference of Lagos Studies Association (LSA) held at the University of Lagos on 27-29 June, 2019

## Migration to online trading

One of the immediate consequences of Covid-19 pandemic in different parts of the world is the migration of retail trade from the conventional market to digitally-inspired trade also called online business, electronic marketing or electronic commerce.<sup>20</sup> Since the beginning of Covid-19 especially with the introduction of preventive measures it was observed that retail trade would likely migrate slowly from a physical consumer to more digitally-inspired consumer interaction. With increased digital penetration the retail market would likely see faster expansion in spending, greater production and services choices and superior user experience and interaction. The realities of the Covid-19 pandemic indicates that companies that would grow stronger from the pandemic experience are those that migrate from non-digital existence with low consumer sensitivity to higher digital engagements with increased consumer participation in influencing product or service decision, quality and delivery.

"The traditional concept of market place may take time to transition to new normal, but Nigeria's young national demography cover 60% of the Nigerian population is between 1 and 35 with growing digital capabilities with result in a gradual reduction in the importance of physical retail platforms. Digital market place will slowly become go-to platforms for fast-moving consumer goods and other more durable purchases. How fast the transition occurs depends on the space of digital interest structural growth and development."<sup>21</sup>

Online business involves the use of electronic medium for selling and buying of a variety of goods such as textiles, foodstuffs, electronics, kitchen wares, fashions, etc. In Nigeria, the practice of online business predated the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020. The emergence of internet has allowed people to advertise their goods for the prospective buyers to purchase and pay either via electronic payment or pay in cash before receiving the goods from a trader or agent. The predominant medium in Kano are the various social platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Telegram. The closure of most of the major markets in

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<sup>20</sup> Proshare Economy Confidential (2020) "Corononomics and the Nigerian Economy: Understanding the Realities of an Impending Recession" 1602-8842 Vol.1.No.204

<sup>21</sup> Proshare Economy Confidential (2020) "Corononomics and the Nigerian Economy: Understanding the Realities of an Impending Recession" 1602-8842 Vol.1.No.204.

the state facilitated the expansion of electronic marketing because people were left with the option of patronizing it as alternative. According to trader in Kano:

"The use of online trading is good initiative, but our business hardly support it. Yes sometimes we use to advertise our new products in social media so that some people can see and buy."<sup>22</sup>

"To me online trading is not a welcome development. Many of those engaged in online business are not traders operating in the markets. They just advertise the samples of goods collected from traders in the markets. Alas, they usually benefited more than the traders with shops in the markets."<sup>23</sup>

## The Triumph of supermarkets and community shops

The history of supermarkets in Kano can be traced to the colonial period when some European multinational corporations and Lebanese firms opened some supermarkets and canteens in order to distribute mostly imported manufactured goods for the demand of Europeans, Lebanese and Indians living in Kano. The earliest markets included Challarams, UTC, Leventis Store, Kingsway, CFAO, Johnholt, Lagos-Kano Store, London and Kano, and Queensway. The introduction of Indigenization Policy in the 1970s had facilitated the establishment of additional supermarkets mostly owned by the Nigerian entrepreneurs. The main objective of the Policy was to promote the participation of Nigerians in various sectors of the economy particularly retail trading and light industry.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Zango Supermarket was established in 1970. This development paved the way for the establishment of many other supermarkets from the 1980s. For example, Sahad Supermarket was established in 1982 and followed by other similar supermarkets established mostly in the metropolis.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Usman Shuaibu Hussain a trader at Kantin Kwari Market on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at his shop in Kantin Kwari Market

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Nura Alhassan A.T.S at Kofar Wambai Market on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020 at Kofar Wambai Market in Kano

<sup>24</sup> C. S. A. Ogbuagu (1983) "The Nigerian Indigenization Policy: Nationalism or Pragmatism? in *African Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 327

<sup>25</sup> A. M. Sani (2015) "A History of Zango and Sahad Supermarkets and their impact on the Socio-economic Development of Kano City, 1970-2013" M.A. Dissertation, Department of History, Bayero University, Kano

Other supermarkets were established from 2000 like Country Mall, Jifatu Departmental Stores, Shoprite (Ado Bayero Mall). Supermarkets were general purpose markets that sold a variety of products including textiles and foodstuff. Prior to the advent of Covid-19, these markets were mostly patronised by elites, while majority of the people preferred to attend conventional markets. In my study I noted that the proliferation of supermarkets could be a great challenge to the traditional markets because customers were gradually abstaining them. According to him:

"...the emergence of supermarkets had considerably affected the patronage of *Kantin Kwari* market in particular and other markets in Kano metropolis in general. Some of the people particularly in the metropolis that prior to the establishment of the supermarkets attended *Kantin Kwari* market now preferred to buy their textile products in the supermarkets. Many factors had contributed to the high patronage of supermarkets at the detriment of traditional or conventional markets. These included the modern marketing services offered by the supermarkets especially their organisation, perceived superior quality of their products and pricing policy (fixing of prices). Indeed, high patronage of the supermarkets had to some extent reduced the number of people that attend the *Kantin Kwari* market."<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, with the closed down of most of the markets in Kano and subsequent granting of supermarkets to operate, people of all classes were left with no other option than to patronize them. This development facilitated more patronage of the supermarkets as many customers continue to patronize them even after reopening of the markets. Additionally, people also patronise community shops located in different parts of Kano. For the majority of the small-scale traders, the closure of markets and allowing the supermarkets to operate was just a way of promoting the economy of major traders at their detriment as a trader interviewed in Singer market says:

"Despite the severe impact of Covid-19 lockdown some major traders have benefited from this situation. For them to say that they have not benefited, is untrue. Majority of these traders have stored their goods in large warehouses and stores. Some of them

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<sup>26</sup> J. Danladi (2015) "A History of *Kantin Kwari* Market in Kano C. 1933-2012" unpublished M. A Dissertation, History, Bayero University, Kano. p. 125

were even allowed to open their shopping malls/supermarkets during the lockdown, when the markets were closed. However, majority of the small-scale traders have been worse affected by the pandemic as they have to struggle for survival. During the lockdown majority of these traders had to use their little capital to feed their families....The inflation was too much. For instance, before the lockdown the price of Sugar was just 14,000 naira but it increased to about 30,000 naira. Also the price of Rice increased from 15,000 to 19,000. The same inflation in other products like milk, although not as high as that of sugar and rice. "<sup>27</sup>

**Table 3: List of Supermarkets/stores approved to operate during COVID-19 lockdown in Kano metropolis**

S/N	Name of Supermarkets/stores	Location/local Government
1.	Murna Stores	Fagge
2.	Garba Karfe Store	Fagge
3.	Sadaraki Store	Fagge
4.	Jaiz Store	Fagge
5.	Hauwa Store	Fagge
6.	Masama Store	Fagge
7.	Almadina Store	Fagge
8.	Jifatu Store	Fagge
9.	Mudassir and Brothers	Fagge
10.	Lauwali Dan Ango Store	Fagge
11.	Kunya Store	Fagge
12.	Joy Supermarket	Fagge
13.	Glass Mall	Fagge
14.	Baby Store	Fagge

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Auwalu Rabi'u Yunusa a trader in Singer market on 20th July, 2020 at his shop in Singer Market in Kano.



15.	Bala Store	Fagge
16.	Layers Supermarkets	Fagge
17.	Jaiz Supermarket	Dala
18.	Nasidi Supermarket	Dala
19.	Aljazeera Supermarket	Dala
20.	Shoprite	Kano Municipal
21.	Sahad Stores	Kano Municipal
22.	Amana Stores	Kano Municipal
23.	Dan Aljanna Store	Kano Municipal
24.	Al-Wabeel Store	Kano Municipal
25.	Jifatu Stores	Kano Municipal
26.	Zango Stores	Kano Municipal
27.	Sahad Store	Gwale
28.	Faiz Store	Gwale
29.	Jujin Labu Store	Gwale
30.	24 hours Store	Gwale
31.	Annafi Stores	Gwale
32.	Garba Karfe Stores	Gwale
33.	Chanies Herbal Store	Gwale
34.	Alpen Store	Gwale
35.	L & Z	Nassarawa
36.	Sufi Mart Store	Nassarawa
37.	Alh. Shu'aibu Super store	Nassarawa
38.	Jifatu Store	Nassarawa
39.	Barkat Store	Nassarawa
40.	Al-Sultan Store	Nassarawa
41.	Sheshe Supermarket	Nassarawa

42.	Lamin Bashir Store	Nassarawa
43.	Sanata Store	Nassarawa
44.	Masallacin Mariya Store	Ungogo
45.	Kwanar Ungogo Stores	Ungogo
46.	Kadawa Na Alhaji Store	Ungogo
47.	Zango Store	Ungogo
48.	Dage-Dage Supermarket	Ungogo



**Plate 2: Traders in the markets in Kano after lifting the lockdown order showing them without observing COVID-19 preventive protocols**

## Conclusion

This paper surveyed the impact is the economic impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Kano's business domain especially how it affected petty traders. Kano is the major commercial and industrial centre in the North and one of the leading centres in Nigeria. The advent of Covid-19 in Nigeria in the early 2020 posed

serious challenges to Kano's business environment. In order to curtail the spread of the virus various policies were introduced that include suspension of international air flight, closed down of all country's borders, inter-state movement restrictions, imposition of lockdown order in many states and closure of markets of about two months. And this happened during the annual trading boom, when most the traders used to record the highest transactions due to increase in demand. These policies resulted to the disruption of trading networks and prevented the flow of goods and services. Of course, this situation affected different categories of traders, but most affected are the small-scale traders, vendors, hawkers, transporters, food and sachet water vendors that depended on these markets for daily earnings. The immediate impacts of these policies include galloping inflation that cut across all categories of goods and services, loss of income and capital, shortage of goods supply, low transactions, poverty and unemployment. Expectedly, traders adopted different survival strategies at least to reduce or leverage severe impact of the pandemic. These strategies comprise the use of online trading, road sites trading, and increasing patronage of supermarkets as alternative to the conventional markets.

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Interview with Umar Ibrahim, Chairman of Kano State Association of Traders of Fruits, Vegetables and other related products (Yankaba Market)

Interview with Auwalu Rabi'u Yunusa a trader in Singer market on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at his shop in Singer Market in Kano

Interview with Yusuf Dankaka Dorayi, a trader at Muhammad Abubakar Rimi (Sabon Gari) Market

Interview with Nura Alhassan A.T.S at Kofar Wambai Market on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020 at Kofar Wambai Market in Kano

Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed Mota former Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Dawanau International Grains Market Trader's Association on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2020

Live Interview with Nura Idris Maliya is former Public Relation Officer (PRO) of trader's association in Kantin Kwari Market with Arewa Radio 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2020

Auwalu Kofar Secretary General of Sabon Gari Market Amalgamated Traders Welfare Association (AMATA) on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at Sabon Gari Market

Nasidi Inuwa Maigwanjo Chairman of Amalgamated Traders Welfare Association Kofar Wambai Market on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at Kofar Wambai Market

Hamisu Garba Vice Chairman of Muhammad Abubakar Rimi (Sabon Gari) Market  
Amalgamated Traders Welfare Association (AMATA) on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at Sabon Gari  
Market

## Appendix I

**THE AGREEMENT REACHED AT THE MEETING BETWEEN KANO STATE  
PUBLIC COMPLAINT AND ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION AND THE  
MARKETERS OF KANO SINGER MARKET DATED 12- RAMADAN, 1441AH,  
May 5, 2020.**

Following series of complaints from the general public in respect of the hoarding and hike in the prices of essential commodities such as sugar, flour, spaghetti e.t.c as well as the shortage of these commodities, the Kano State Public Complaints & Anti-corruption Commission was directed by the Governor in accordance with the provision of Regulation 11(2) (3) & (4) of the Kano State Public Health (infection diseases) Regulations 2020 to respond to these complaints. The commission therefore invoked its powers as contained under the provisions of Sections 9 & 15 of its enabling law and lunched an investigation into the matter. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, 2020, the Commission embarked on an operation which led to the identification and the sealing of some warehouses where essential commodities suspected to have been hoarded were kept.

The commodities discovered and sealed by the commission are as follows:

1. Flour 19,500 bags
2. Spaghetti 79,645 cartons
3. Sugar 5120 bags
4. Macaroni 37,000 cartons

Today being the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 2020, while this operation was in top gear and all arrangement to have this matter filed before the court for the prosecution of marketers who were found to have kept, in their possessions and warehouses, items that formed the subject matter of the investigation. It was at this point that the marketers of singer marker under the leadership of the chairman in the person of Alh Uba Yakasai approached the Commission with a view to have the matter resolved amicably.

The meeting had in attendance the following persons:

1. The Executive Chairman of the Commission
2. The Commissioner I & II of the Commission
3. The Directors of the Commission
4. Uba Zubair Yakubu

5. Ibrahim Danyaro
6. Muhammad Adukwa
7. Alh Namadi Inuwa
8. Alh Sabo Dankoli
9. Yusuf A. Ayagi
10. Sani Adamu Trader
11. Muhammed Abdullahi Dan Gongola
12. Ali Muhammad Adakawa
13. Hamisu Rabiu Jingau
14. Ashiru Ali Yammusa
15. Muhammad Sabo Danladi
16. Munzali Muhammad Zakari
17. Ahmed Sabo
18. Abdullahi Adam

The marketers were in company of their legal representatives who are as follows:

1. Rabiu I. Muhammad Esq
2. Sani Abdulkadir Abubakar Esq
3. Sagir Suleiman Gezawa Esq

Following the discussion and deliberation at the meeting, the Commission reached an agreement with the marketers and finally resolved as follows;

1. It was unanimously agreed that as a result of the commission's operation, the price of sugar has now reduced to 18,000:00k as at 4/5/2020 as such the overall objectives of the Government's intervention through the commission may have been achieved
2. They informed the commission that the shortage of commodities in the state which skyrocketed the prices was due to the inability of the manufactures to release the commodities to the markers as such it was agreed that, the Commission will persuade His Excellency the Executive Governor to organize a meeting between the manufactures and the marketers in order to have and maintain a common price accordingly.

3. That Singer market, being the market for the wholesalers will be allowed to supply the commodities to local shops and supermarkets during lockdown as in other jurisdiction.
4. The warehouses sealed by the commission will be allowed to open and supply the commodities to singer market and all approved supermarkets/ malls under the strict supervision of the commission.
5. The marketers undertook that, if the market is allowed to operate within 3 days, all the prices of the commodities will returned to normal.
6. The commission will arrange a meeting with Rice manufactures in the state in order to checkmate their role in artificial inflation of the prices.
7. Social distance must be observed in singer market and other superstores in the State.
8. With this agreement the marketers undertook to set the price of sugar at ₦16,000:00k only per bag.

  
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Alh Uba Yakasai  
Chairman Singer Market

  
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Ibrahim Danyaro  
Deputy Chairman Singer Market

  
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Rabiu Gezawa  
Commissioner I PCACC

  
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Baba Sharif Dala  
Commissioner II PCACC