

Outlining the Challenges of Covid-19 Pandemic on Africa's Maritime Industry: The Case of Marine and Seafaring Professionals

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Failure to accord seafarers a 'Key Worker' status amid Covid-19 pandemic before the December 1, 2020, resolution, during moments of demonstrated selflessness (in food, medicines, consumables like Personal Protective Equipment and energy supply), is evidence of the lack of genuine interest in their concerns despite the calls from major stakeholders thus, United Nations and International Maritime Organization. The calls associates with various covid-19-related policies and regulations resulting in crew change crises, maroon and overstay of contracts, poor mental health, covid-19 infections, and other unrelated illnesses. To what extent are non-traditional seafaring nations of Africa being impacted? The study examines these concerns with the aim, a resolution per objectives will assist counter future crises and consequential fallouts for mariners. The objective is to identify and investigate implemented covid-19 policies and regulations to develop the understanding of key aspects of its impact on maritime operations and crew 'wellbeing'. The study then examines contingency measures and innovations that most appropriately helped in mitigating responses with minimal challenges to seafarers and marine professionals. The study followed a case study approach focusing on West Africa's maritime corridor (focus on Ghana, Ivory Coast and Nigeria) hosting various ports and offshore installations. The instruments chosen for this research were field observations, survey questionnaires and interviews of expert or 'eyewitness' account, deployed via phone calls, online platforms. The study finds general awareness of the Covid-19 virus, Covid-19 related protocols, regulations, and vaccines as high amongst respondents. Embarkation quarantine implemented for offshore Ghana, Nigeria and Angola have largely been effective identifying cases. Few cases discovered on destination vessels, offshore Angola, suggest quarantine failure. Stigma concerning positive test cases amongst the crew was prevalent in the first six months of pandemic declaration. The survey of 71 vessel crew showed 32.14% were certain of Covid-19 positive cases on Jobsite, only 19% addressed issues of proximity to covid-19. Such situation led to delay quarantines, further isolation,

and cancellation of embarkation for identified individuals. 30% complained of the high level of uncertainties over the period as fueling poor mental health. Cancellation of contracts, overstayed contracts, unpaid and reduce wages in violation of International Labour Organization's Maritime Labour Convention 2006 was prevalent in first six-month of pandemic. 91.06% of respondents gave support for IMO-led interventions providing reliefs. In some cases, crew were not notified of cases detected or suspected particularly, influencing remorse and agitations onboard. Mitigating measures against poor mental health included increased internet and call access, and extensive boarding protocols. Vaccine inoculations upon commencing March 2021 remains low for marine professionals in the region. The study recommends transparency with information about cases found onboard ships while accelerating need for seafarers' recognition for preferential treatment amid a pandemic. The need for the UN and IMO to consider developing a novel international emergency contingency regulation and associated guidelines based on current shortfalls observed in current regulations contradicted by covid-19 related regulatory protocols. Such a document should automatically come live seeking to normalize operation upon global emergency declaration leading to the suspension of all regulations implemented in normal time.

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