

## IMPROVING CHILD HEALTH IN NIGERIA: NEED FOR A MULTI-SECTORIAL APPROACH

Lips services have been paid to quality health care, education and other services for the children in Nigeria. Access to education remains much below the desired level with formidable challenges continuing to confront attaining the set goals for the health sector. These have resulted in poor immunization coverage, slow progress in the control of locally endemic diseases and worsening of the health of the Nigerian children. The under-five children constitute the most vulnerable group when child health is discussed. However, older children who are free from childhood killer diseases are liable to child abuse, rape and other assaults.

Slight improvement in child health has been recorded in the country though in a different manner between geopolitical zones. Statistics shows that the overall health status of the Nigerian child has improved slightly in other parts of the country compared to the North. Several strategies through vertical programmes have been tried. However, little impact was seen on the health of children in Nigeria. Making Nigeria fit for children require collective and individual efforts.

The job of improving child health is not what the government can do alone, all health care providers, child health specialists, Non-governmental organizations have a role to play. Well-coordinated child health care services in the health facilities, household and communities have shown more impact in other countries. Such services are not only focused on the children but it should incorporate adolescent/pre-pregnancy care, pregnancy, birth, postpartum and maternal health care. Fast-tracking the effort to improve child health in Nigeria requires the active collaboration of a range of stakeholders. Each stakeholder will need to contribute appropriately in a well-coordinated manner.

### Role of Government

Fulfilling the basic rights of the African child across the broad range of focal areas continue to be confronted with a myriad of factors such as inadequate political will. Government must be responsible by demonstrating the required political will and provide leadership to civil society, development partners and the community, and health practitioner in ensuring that all children in the country have equal access to health care irrespective of their location. The role of the government in delivering qualitative care cannot be overemphasised. Domestic health financing towards improving child health should be harnessed.

Programmes that will strengthen the health systems should be encouraged rather than vertical programme that are known to be capital intensive with little impact. The overall strengthening of the health care system is important.

The Government should demonstrate commitment in ensuring synergies in the implementation of programmes and provision of services that affect children are facilitated. Government should ensure that resources are available where and when they are needed. Human, financial and material resources as required should be accessible.

### Role of Development Partners

The strategic role of development partners should be aligned with the national system to rapid and sustainable development of national capacities and ownership of relevant programmes. The developing partners should facilitate the strengthening of institutional capacity across multiple line sectors and systems, including those of Civil Society.

### Role of Civil Society

Civil Society is central to initiatives to promote the welfare and development of children. They have the advantage of access both to the lowest levels of the community as well as the highest level of governance. Therefore, the strengths of Civil Society should be leverage in a wide range of areas including, Community mobilization and behaviour change communication to facilitate the adoption of child responsive practices and jettison practices which are harmful to children; Extending (through innovative means) the reach of critical (government) service such as education, health, psychosocial support to the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach areas.

### Role of Community Members

Family relationships provide the most immediate source of support to children. They should be empowered to undertake this supportive role. Interventions to enhance the capacity of the family to effectively take part in their responsibilities should be emphasized, improving household economic capacity and support child care. Therefore communities must be mobilized in such a way that their key concerns are taken into consideration. Faith-based and non-governmental organizations should play a critical role in addition to the role of the community members and promote routine immunisation of children,

maternal immunization for tetanus toxoid, ensuring attendance of antenatal care, skilled attendance at delivery

### **Role of Health Care Workers**

Health care workers need to collaborate to meet the objectives of child care. The objectives include promotion of optimal physical and emotional growth and development of the young child and prompt diagnosis and treatment of diseases. The services required to meet the above objectives should not be left for the paediatrician. Doctors in different speciality should identify their role in ensuring optimal care for our children. Children are the future of our country.

### **Role of Parents**

Parental roles in the care of a child cannot be overemphasized in terms of guidance, living a healthy lifestyle and good physical appearance because child's

behaviour, and growth are usually shaped by observation and adaptation hence reduction in child's abuse, rape and assaults. Charity they say begins at home.

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**Ilesanmi O.S.**

*Editor-in-Chief*