



LADY HELEN CHILD HEALTH FOUNDATION (LHCHF)

VIRTUAL SUMMIT

On

**Impact of COVID 19 on Children and the Family –
Navigating the Solutions**

Thursday 26th November 2020.

1.0 BACKGROUND

The 2020 Lady Helen Child Health Foundation Summit on the impact of COVID 19 on Children and Family was held via Zoom on Thursday 26th November 2020. The event was organized as part of the Lady Helen Child Health Foundation responsibility to advocate on behalf of vulnerable children in line with its visions and mission, and to facilitate information dissemination to the vulnerable community. The Summit provided the platform for the Federal Ministry of Health, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, Federal Ministry of Education, FCTA, the Orphanage Homes and the Private medical Sector to inform participants about COVID 19 and its impact on children as well as highlight what relevant government agencies are doing.

There are issues about COVID in Africa with obvious impacts, resulting in the provision of mixed messages that has been peddled around and we have different context to our understanding about the salient issues. Also, there has been doubt and concerns in the scientific world about the content and quality of the of what the local media portrays to the public about COVID. This has resulted in a lot of misinformation, misunderstanding and confusion about the real issue. In the case of children, there are emotional issues surrounding how COVID can best be managed within this group and the lack of measurable impact especially on those who are vulnerable has been another challenge. At this summit, the speakers eventually ventilated the issues and gave some inroad and insight that illuminated our understanding of what the government and other organizations did and are doing in addressing this situation.

2.0 OPENING

The opening remark was given by Dr. Benjamin Odeka, a Consultant in Paediatrics & Gastroenterology (UK), Expert in Healthcare management & Governance, a medico legal expert, Researcher in child health, CEO and Founder, Lady Helen Child Health Foundation. In his remark, he welcomed everyone for joining the zoom summit that was organized due to the current impact of COVID 19 and the need to discuss the impact and navigate the solutions to this issue.

He also gave a brief introduction about the work of the Lady Helen Child Health Foundation, its vision, mission and its tripod programme of **Research, Advocacy and PTAP (RAP)**, laying emphases on the need to advance this programme and its activities, he stated that the Foundation would need more support because for the time being, the foundation has been able to sustain its programmes and activities with funding by the CEO from endowment and generous donations from its supporters, team of Ambassadors, Volunteers and very few well-meaning Nigerians.

3.0 ACCOUNT OF PROCEEDINGS

The presentation at the summit addressed the Impact of COVID 19 on Children and the Family, starting with the medical perspective and followed by a stakeholder who had first-hand experience of caring for vulnerable children. Thereafter the Ministry of health and other Ministries and Agencies catering for vulnerable persons in our society gave their views about the impact of COVID 19 and what the government is doing to support the vulnerable groups on the issue.

The first speaker, Dr. Ofoegbu a Consultant Paediatrician and Chief Neonatologist in a private hospital in the United Arab Emirate. Prior to this, she was a Consultant in United Kingdom. Trained in the United Kingdom and in Nigeria, Dr. Ofoegbu presented data collated from UNICEF and WHO on COVID 19 and its impact. Ambassador. Ngozi Anih Goerge, Founder and Director of FACADO orphanage home in the FCT, the second speaker gave us the perspective of a stakeholder who has actually seen the effect of COVID 19 in action and its impact on the vulnerable children in the orphanage home. Following her presentation was that of the Ministry of Health, represented by Dr. Omokore Oluseyi, Head of Child Survival Branch which is very topical in discussing the issues. This was followed by the Ministry of Education represented by Mr. Oderemi Olugbenga, Deputy Director, ICT/Education after which the Ministry of Women Affairs represented by Mr. Andrew Ali Magudu gave the insight of the Minister on the topic and what the Ministry has been doing in this regards and finally the last presenter was Mrs. Ayandiran Folashade, a Principal Social Welfare Officer of the Social Development Secretariat, as representative of FCTA.

4.0 PRESENTATIONS

4.1 Presentation 1: The first presentation was delivered by Dr. Bibian Ofoegbu, representing the private sector health practitioners, in her presentation; she gave an outline on the followings:

- Accuracy and verification of data
- Access to reliable screening centers
- Access to reporting systems
- Likely under-reported COVID numbers – cases and deaths- in Africa
- Births and deaths still not 100% registered and recorded across Nigeria

As well as the Impact of COVID on Children as follows:

- Health- nutrition; access to vaccinations, delayed presentation
- Mental health

- Vulnerable children- with special needs- Cerebral palsy; autism etc
- Child poverty
- Access to education
- Family abuse- stress in home associated with job losses
- Increase in child labor

Key outcomes

Doctors in Nigeria are well trained and have the right knowledge but lacking in resources, organization, accountability and responsibility.

Government should make available all necessary resources for Nigeria Doctors to cater for the vulnerable children and families.

It has been pure luck that death due to the pandemic in Nigeria and other African countries had not escalated as predicted by developed countries. Need to ensure that pandemic management measures incorporating relevant professional groups are adequately harnessed and funded in state of preparedness at all times.

4.2 Presentation 2: Ambassador. Ngozi Anih Goerge, founder and director of FACADO orphanage home in the FCT, gave her insight on the psychological effect of COVID 19 on children in the orphanage home stating that Children live in fear of death and anxiety daily due to the media reports of COVID victims as shown on television. She stated that one of the impacts of COVID 19 was the hindrances on learning due to closure of schools and the inability to access alternatives to classroom teaching like online learning, hence they stayed at home with attendant increase in sexual harassment even from their family members.

In addition, she laid emphasis on the lack of adequate social support during the pandemic, coupled with the increase in prices of essential commodities which led to difficulty for most orphanages to cope and as such needed support in areas of;

- Food items
- Educational support – school fees, books, computers.
- Cash for salaries and home upkeep especially fueling and electricity bill.
- Provision of free electricity for all orphanages
- Educational support from the government and well-meaning individuals
- Grants should be given to orphanage homes to help them establish a viable business that can support the home.
- Free medical care for orphans
- Provision of survival funds

Key outcomes

There is a need for the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs to enable orphanages establish businesses that will provide additional support to the vulnerable children and for the Ministry of Health to provide free medical services to orphans. Orphanages

received little help from governments during the lockdown. As such, they thrived through that period with support from their trustee members and individual supports. There is therefore the need to ensure that a clear and transparent support stream and avenue is available for these organisations to tap into to alleviate sufferings of these vulnerable groups.

4.3 Presentation 3: The Ministry of Health, represented by Dr. Omokore Oluseyi, Head of Child Survival Branch, informed the participants that the COVID 19 pandemic overstretched the health system due to increased admission rates to isolation centres which inevitably lead to reduced utilization of health facilities because of fear of contracting the disease at those facilities. There was also the disruption of routine immunization due to lock down leading to increased child morbidity and mortality rate. Other areas affected by the pandemic include adolescent health with increase in rape, unwanted pregnancy and mental health issues as well.

Dr. Oluseyi stated that the Ministry of health is working with the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) in development of guidelines on infection control in the paediatric population, training and scaling up of testing in the 36 states +FCT, with private labs, to scale up testing and also with the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (MWASD) to carry out health evaluation to ensure that vulnerable, malnourished and impoverished children are tested and given welfare support.

Key outcome

- Need for the Ministry of Health to put adequate strategies in place based on data gathered from on-going research work.
- Need for adequate awareness and enlightenment programs to be put in place by the Federal Government to prepare the general public and give them enough confidence to get vaccinated with the COVID 19 vaccine when eventually available.
- Need to increase funding for health provisions to the vulnerable children
- Need to ensure that medical personnel in the forefront of managing Covid have adequate protection and remuneration to carry out their roles.
- There should be immediate upgrade and funding of health institutions in the country as the Covid 19 has shown the inadequacy of the country's health infrastructure and management.
- There is a need to explore responsive ways of providing health to the vulnerable groups and also to conduct a post Covid 19 audit of the response to their provisions.
- There should be tangible and impactful evidence of synergy work between health and social welfare care especially as it affects the vulnerable groups.

4.4 Presentation 4: The Federal Ministry of Education represented by Mr. Oderemi Olugbenga, Deputy Director ICT/Education presented an outline of COVID 19 implications on Education and Responses. He highlighted the point that students were abruptly stopped and horribly dispatched home to their parents in the middle of writing their 2nd term examinations. The early release of students however is believed to have reduced transmission in schools. The longer the closure of schools remained, the situation did not abate and students had to stay much longer at home, in idle mode and frustrating circumstances to parents. He further stated that the pandemic fractured school calendar, in all the tiers of education, which led to students losing almost one school year across all tiers. This development had indeed altered the narrative on the traditional methods of teaching, requiring new strategies such as the use of e-learning platform to keep students busy at home. In addition, he informed the participants that the Ministry has a policy on inclusive education which will soon enter its implementation phase, and also pointed out that most schools in the Federation have ICT Labs and Internet provision but the challenge is non-renewal at the expiration of the bandwidth and funding for data to run such program.

Key outcomes

- There should be constant consultations with critical stakeholders to establish the right course of action on matters that concerns the sector
- E-learning may just be the new normal for education across the country.
- Need for more investment will have to be made in providing electronic platforms and improving an ICT infrastructure.
- The school structure as it is currently may need to be reviewed to reflect the new challenges brought about by COVID-19.
- Education sector needs more funding from both government and private bodies.
- Government is keen to include in its education policy a reflection of the key lessons learnt from the experience of the management of Covid 19.

4.5 Presentation 5: Mr. Andrew Ali Madugu, Deputy Director (OVC) presented the view of the Hon. Minister for the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development on the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Children and their Family , laying emphases on the issues of family crisis; upsurge in Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), rape cases, teenage pregnancies, child marriage, child exploitation, child labour, child battery, incest and other forms of violence against women, children and the vulnerable groups.

In his presentation, he informed participants that the Ministry is charged with the mandate to ensure the continuous improvement of the welfare and well-being of women, children and the vulnerable groups in all facets of national life, including their empowerment, protection and advancement of their social rights in Nigeria, and in this regard, the Ministry put in place measures and interventions principally targeted at women, children and the most vulnerable groups in the society which includes:

- Provision of a Toll-free line (08031230651) for reporting cases of violence against women and girls, including Sexual Based Violence

- Distribution of food palliatives to some Women organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, Orphanages and Households in the FCT
- Distribution of educational materials and Menstrual Hygiene Kits to students of Government Science Secondary School, Pyakasa, Maitama to mark the 2020 International Day of the Girl Child on 12th October, 2020.
- Provision of Nutritional Support and Medical outreaches to Women and Children in IDP Camps and Children's Homes in the FCT;

Key outcomes

- Ministry of Women Affairs to visit each state of the Federation especially the ten who are yet to sign into law the Child Right Act to advocate to the leaders (Government, Legislators and Stakeholders) of those states of its importance and relevance.
- Need to include all necessary 'Assistance' for the vulnerable in the budget to avoid it being just an occasional event.
- Ministry of Women Affairs is proactive to address the issues of gender based Violence and active in encouraging states to domesticate various laws that will improve the life of women and children in their states.
- The MWA has an effective link with NGOs and will continue to seek ways of improving engagements as the Minister feels the pulse of this group in all her dealings.

4.6 Presentation 6: The Principal Social Welfare Officer, Social Development Secretariat, Mrs. Ayandiran Folashade representing the Federal Capital Territory Administration FCTA, talked about the psycho social impact of COVID-19 on children, stating that COVID-19 brought change of routines to what we were used to thereby affecting proper social interactions and relationships which is very vital to the growth of children. She pointed out that the lock down and isolations resulted in post-traumatic stress, frustrations, anxiety, feeling of abandonment, depression and also the spiritual life of families were adversely affected as the gender department witnessed increase in children brought into the facilities for custody due to poverty and inability of parents to take care of them and in addition, there was an upsurge in cases of gender based violence especially against the girl child.

Actions taken and Outcomes

- Distribution of palliatives to cushion the effect of COVID-19 on FCT residents
- The sexual and gender based violence unit are on red alert to attend to all cases.
- Increased consultation unit registered children's homes on how to accommodate more children.
- Urgent need to improve distribution of materials in terms of need and mechanisms require a rethink and improved governance stream and accountability.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the presentations and discussions on the impact of COVID-19 on children and the family and – Navigating the solutions, the summit put together the pressure points from key outcomes of each presentation as recommendations for the way forward:

- The Federal Government should make all necessary resources available for Nigerian Doctors to cater for the vulnerable.
- There is a need for the Federal Ministry of Health to provide free medical services to orphans. Orphanages received support from governments during the lockdown. As such, they thrived throughout that period support from their trustee members and individual supports.
- Need for the Federal Ministry of Health to put adequate strategies in place based on data gathered from on-going research work.
- There is need for adequate awareness and enlightenment programs to be put in place by the Federal Government to prepare the general public and give them enough confidence to get vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine when eventually acquired.
- There should be constant consultations with critical stakeholders to establish the right course of action on matters that concerns the Education sector
- Need for more investment to be made in providing electronic platforms and improving the ICT infrastructure in schools.
- The school structure as it is currently, may need to be reviewed to reflect the new challenges brought about by COVID-19.
- Ministry of Women affairs to visit each state of the Federation especially the ten who are yet to sign into law the Child Right Act to advocate to the leaders (Government, Legislators and Stakeholders) of those states of its importance and relevance.
- Need to include all necessary 'Assistance' for the vulnerable in the budget of Federal Ministry of Women Affairs for the vulnerable group.
- There is the need to ensure that adequate planning for managing epidemics and pandemics are in place with careful attention to material distribution network in place especially to the vulnerable groups and should be responsive to include relevant professional groups. The Federal, State and Local governments must work with vision and synergy to ensure that the goals of alleviating suffering during these periods are mitigated by their proactive stances.
- There should be transparency in the distribution of materials and the use of the people's resources in times of need. Serious consideration should be given to the funding streams designated to the vulnerable groups as a matter of course and not as a knee jerk response. **The lives of vulnerable children matter.**