

## Essay I

### Community Health and Welfare in Southwestern Nigeria

Humans remain at the centre of concerns for sustainable development across the globe. Therefore, the goals of sustainable development cannot be achieved when the medical wellbeing of the society is endangered. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. However, the health indicators for Nigeria are among the worst in the world. For instance, the final report of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015 showed that Nigeria accounted for 10% of the global disease burden. Similarly, available report on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a continuation and expansion of the MDGs, though, indicated reduction in the under-five mortality rate from 157 to 132. Nevertheless, other indicators showed that the nation is not making appreciable gains in her health sector due to poverty. There is a spectrum of wealth inequality that predisposes the vulnerable people to health issues.

To address the challenges of quality healthcare affordability in Nigeria, the Federal Government established the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Through the NHIS, a Community Based Health Insurance Scheme (CBHIS) was initiated to promote affordable healthcare, predominantly among the vulnerable people in informal sector. In addition to this, are several multinationals and local non-governmental organisations working to reduce health-related problems to mitigate social issues and optimize manpower. The Excellent Assembly and *Idera* Life Line Medical Centre are two notable examples working to improve the health of the vulnerable and marginalized people in the rural community. These organizations seek to strengthen community-based health education, increase the accessibility, affordability and quality of public and private healthcare in rural areas. In a one-day Free Healthcare Services held on 23 January, 2021 in Ede, Osun State southwestern Nigeria, they provided free medical healthcare such as:

1. Free Surgical Interventions
2. Free Ultrasound Scan for Pregnant Women
3. Free Medical Checkups: HIV, Hepatitis B, and Diabetes
4. Free TB Screening and Treatment
5. Free Consultation and Counseling
6. Medical Education/Awareness

The medical team comprised of 13 professional medical doctors, 7 surgeons, 6 consultants, 2 pharmacists and 7 auxiliary nurses. Among the medical team were two members of the Excellent Assembly, who leveraged on inter-personal and professional network to mobilise their colleagues in public and private health institutions for the exercise. Through fundraising campaigns, membership contribution and supports from private individuals, the organizing committee was able to realize and expend a sum of five million Naira for the procurement of surgical materials, drugs and other medical materials required for the programme. In addition to posters, handbills, and fliers distributed across strategic locations in Ede, there was also a-week long advertisement programme on various media platforms to mobilise participants. As a prelude to the exercise, the organizing committee granted facility inspection, especially for the supposed

beneficiaries of surgical operations. This familiarization demonstrated the committee's preparedness for a non-complicated surgical exercise.

The exercise witnessed an overwhelming turnout, especially the women and young adults living with different ailments. During the exercise, the medical practitioners gained new insights hands-on experiences in doctor-patient relationship. There is no gainsaying that aside the infrastructural deficit and other related challenges facing access to quality and affordable healthcare in Nigeria, poverty complicates public access to quality healthcare services. Arguable, the hallmark of the free healthcare services was the successful surgical operation for such ailments as giant lipoma, appendectomy, lobectomy, myomectomy, herniotomy and hydrocelectomy for at least 35 beneficiaries. In addition to these, 75 pregnant women received free Ultrasound Scan and pregnancy-related health awareness to reduce maternal and child mortality. Drugs were also distributed to several other participants after careful diagnoses of various diseases and ailments. Furthermore, tests were conducted on communicable and non-communicable diseases, such as HIV-AIDS, Hepatitis B, Tuberculosis and Diabetes. According to the leadership of Excellent Assembly, it is projected that the medical outreach will become an annual event. Subsequent events will focus on expanding the beneficiaries to include more vulnerable people, especially older women and nursing mothers. The Excellent Assembly is also working on attracting more funds through collaborations to sustain the free medical services. It is hoped that services like this will continue to propel the survival of African communities in the face of new challenges.

Overall, the free healthcare service provided by the two organisations was successful because it addressed an important need of the receiving community, in the case of affordable healthcare and access to free health education. The impressive turnout demonstrated the organizations' success in fulfilling this need. Part of the project's success also lies in the fact that it was initiated by grassroots establishments and sought the support of the local community. This community based approach underlines the far reaching impact of locally generated or supported projects in successfully alleviating social issues.