



Caritas Stylus

A Caritas Nigeria Newsletter



WiAC Celebrates Women's Day with Reverence and Joy



Caritas Nigeria Hosts 4th Bi-annual Stakeholder Engagement Meeting



The B-SLiC Project Enhances Veterinary Care in Ekiti State

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EDITORIAL

Caritas Nigeria's activities in the previous quarter reflect our dedication to addressing pressing needs and promoting sustainable development through strategic partnerships, capacity building, and comprehensive interventions. It is with joy and gratitude, therefore, that I share the highlights of our initiatives and their profound impact on the communities we serve.

To effectively carry out our mandate of reaching the poor in society, Caritas Nigeria leverages strategic partnership-strengthening opportunities to brainstorm ways of serving communities better. One such collaboration platform was the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Bi-annual Stakeholders Engagement Meeting, which was a cornerstone event that was pivotal in fostering dialogue, sharing insights, and aligning our strategies with the broader goals of health system strengthening and sustainable development. The collaborative spirit and innovative ideas generated during this engagement have reinvigorated our efforts and laid the groundwork for more effective and coordinated interventions in the months ahead.

Capacity-strengthening initiatives have been a focal point of our activities, recognizing that empowered individuals and communities are key to sustainable progress. Within the month, we conducted a series of intensive training sessions aimed at enhancing the skills and knowledge of our staff and local partners. These sessions covered areas such as advanced healthcare practices, effective project implementation, and community engagement strategies. Similarly, livelihood empowerment remains a critical component of our mission to foster resilience and self-sufficiency. Our programs provided training and economic empowerment to hundreds of individuals, helping them secure a stable income and improve their quality of life.

Healthcare interventions have been at the heart of Caritas Nigeria's efforts, addressing both immediate

needs and long-term health challenges. We continue to make significant strides in our HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs, offering comprehensive care and support to those affected. Likewise, our partnerships with the Government of Nigeria and local health authorities have been instrumental in enhancing the reach and effectiveness of these interventions, ensuring that even the most vulnerable populations have access to quality healthcare.

As we advance into the rest of the year, Caritas Nigeria remains steadfast in its commitment to creating positive, lasting change. We hope you enjoy this edition of Caritas Stylus as usual

Thank you for your continued support.

Best wishes,



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From the Executive Secretary/CEO's Desk

Dear Friends,



As we step into the second quarter of 2024, I am filled with pride and optimism reflecting on the remarkable progress and impactful initiatives we have embarked on together. Our commitment to humanitarian aid and integral human/institutional development remains steadfast, and we are continually inspired by the resilience and strength of the communities we serve.

It is unique that this year, the call to embrace love this Easter started on 14 February, marking the beginning of Lent and a day known worldwide to celebrate love. This love was epitomised by God the Father, who gave up his only begotten son for our salvation, serving as a reminder of God's precious love for us.

In the same vein, Caritas, whose name means 'charity' in Latin, is driven by a profound love for humanity. Through the guidance of our Catholic social teachings, we seek to alleviate suffering, promote justice, and empower the marginalized. In the spirit of this divine love, Caritas Nigeria stands as a beacon of hope, compassion, and service, to humanity by imitating the steps of Jesus Christ in caring for the poor and needy.

Our world today is full of division and indifference. This Easter season, we are reminded of the profound themes of hope, renewal, and compassion. The resurrection of Christ symbolizes the triumph of life over death and light over darkness, reflecting the very essence of our mission at Caritas Nigeria. Looking beyond herself, Caritas Nigeria recognizes the inherent dignity of every individual and responds with empathy and solidarity.

Our work is a testament to these themes, as we strive to bring light to those in the darkest of circumstances, offer new beginnings to those in need, and spread hope through our acts of kindness and support. Just as Easter renews our faith and spirit, our initiatives aim to renew the lives and prospects of the communities we serve, instilling hope and resilience in their hearts.

As we celebrate this Easter season, may we be inspired to embrace love in its purest form – a love that is sacrificial, transformative, and unconditional. Let us heed the call to love our neighbors as ourselves, to extend a hand of kindness to the stranger, and to work tirelessly for the common good.

Yours in the service of Caritas,

Rev. Fr. Uchechukwu Obodoechina, PhD
Executive Secretary/CEO



WiAC Celebrates Women's Day with Reverence and Joy



The festivities continued with a cake-cutting ceremony, symbolizing the sweetness and significance of motherhood and womanhood. A captivating cultural presentation followed, showcasing the rich tapestry of Nigerian heritage and the vitality of communal celebration. Amidst the jubilant atmosphere, Ivy Basil, Caritas Nigeria's Business Development Advisor, delivered an enlightening presentation on Gender-Based Violence, highlighting the urgent need to advocate for the rights and safety of women in society.



On April 12, the Women in Agencies of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (WiAC) celebrated Mother's Day at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Abuja. The event commenced with a Holy Mass presided over by the CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi. In his homily, Fr. Samjumi underscored the innate qualities and nurturing spirit inherent in women, emphasizing their remarkable gift to nurture and support the human person.



Overall, the event served as a poignant tribute to the tireless efforts of women, honouring their resilience, compassion, and strength. It reinforced the importance of acknowledging and appreciating the invaluable contributions of women who enrich lives daily through their unwavering dedication and love.

Following the solemn liturgical celebration, the atmosphere shifted into a joyous festivity organized to honour women's essence. In her heartfelt opening remarks, the President of WiAC, Mrs Ogechi Unegbu, extended her appreciation to the priests and religious for their unwavering support of the female staff since the establishment of the organization in 2014. As a gesture of gratitude, the President presented gifts to all the priests present, symbolizing her deep respect and admiration for their contributions.



Caritas Nigeria Hosts 4th Bi-annual Stakeholder Engagement Meeting

On April 16 and 17, Caritas Nigeria hosted the CDC Nigeria 4th Bi-annual Stakeholder Engagement Meeting in Abuja. The event, which centred around the theme, “Improving Public Health Programs through Science”, brought together implementing partners of the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and public health stakeholders from 19 Nigerian states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), serving as a vital platform for discussions and collaboration.

In a welcome address, the Country Director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Nigeria, Dr Mary Atinuke Boyd, underscored the conference’s overarching objective of bolstering collaboration between PEPFAR, its partners, and the Nigerian government to fortify the national HIV response. The event’s agenda was rich with abstract presentations, poster gallery walks, and in-depth discussions focused on leveraging scientific advancements to inform evidence-based public health initiatives. A notable highlight of the first day of the event was the insightful contributions of Caritas Nigeria’s Executive Secretary/CEO, Rev. Fr. Uchechukwu Obodoechina, PhD, shedding light on the indispensable role of faith-based organizations in the realm of public health.

Day two of the meeting saw a panel discussion which had the Chief of Party of Caritas Nigeria’s ACCESS project, Dr John Oko, sharing invaluable strategies aimed at enhancing HIV care and treatment services in Abia, Enugu, and Imo States. Central to his message was the importance of collaboration between government entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and communities in overcoming the multifaceted challenges posed by HIV/AIDS. Additionally, there was an award ceremony recognizing exemplary achievements and contributions towards public health advancement. Dr Boyd was presented with the prestigious Champion Award for her outstanding leadership and unwavering commitment to improving public health outcomes in Nigeria.



Notably, Plateau State secured the top spot for the highest number of Abstracts submitted, closely followed by Imo and Ogun States. Delta and Rivers States clinched the third position, underscoring their commendable efforts in bolstering public health initiatives. Also, the recognition of Oluwaseun Akinlulero for the best oral abstract presentation on Global Health Security and System Strengthening underscores the commitment to fostering innovation and excellence within the public health sphere.



Photo Gallery



Empowering Healthcare Professionals on HIV Recency Surveillance Training



In a proactive effort to enhance the capabilities of healthcare workers, researchers, and public health actors, Caritas Nigeria conducted a comprehensive 5-day HIV Recency Surveillance training program, beginning April 15, for key healthcare personnel from supported facilities in our ACCESS project states of Abia, Enugu, and Imo. This initiative aimed to provide participants with advanced insights into epidemiological trends, monitoring and tracking of HIV cases, and proficient data collection and reporting methodologies.

Central to the training curriculum was the emphasis on mortality surveillance for people living with HIV (PLHIV) and the critical importance of integrating HIV recency testing into routine HIV testing services. Through a combination of theoretical sessions and hands-on practical exercises, participants were equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of HIV surveillance effectively.



As the healthcare landscape continues to evolve, initiatives, such as the HIV Recency Surveillance training, serve as indispensable tools in fortifying the frontline defence against HIV/AIDS. Caritas Nigeria's commitment to empowering healthcare professionals underscores its dedication to advancing public health outcomes and sustainable progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS within the eastern region.

Empowering Healthcare Workers HIV Prevention with Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

In a concerted effort to mitigate HIV vulnerabilities, Caritas Nigeria, through the support of PEPFAR and CDC Nigeria, conducted a capacity-strengthening session for healthcare workers in our supported facilities in Abia and Imo States. The training aimed at equipping participants with the necessary skills to effectively deliver Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) services to at-risk individuals in the states.



Over the three-day training, the healthcare workers engaged in intensive discussions aimed at enhancing their proficiency in various aspects of PrEP service delivery. From PrEP pre-assessment and screening to eligibility criteria, side effects management, and regular testing, the curriculum provided a comprehensive overview of PrEP implementation strategies. One of the standout features of the training was its emphasis on practical exercises, including the development of a PrEP roll-out work plan.



The cohort of participants represented a cross-section of key stakeholders in both states, including the State Agencies for the Control of AIDS (SACA), Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (SAPC) representatives, and our Anti-retroviral Therapy service providers. From nurses and pharmacists to

laboratory technicians and community healthcare workers, each participant played a crucial role in the collective effort to combat HIV/AIDS within the region. Armed with their newfound knowledge and practical experience, they are now better equipped to identify high-risk individuals, provide tailored counselling, and facilitate access to PrEP services.



— Photo Gallery —



The B-SLiC Project Enhances Veterinary Care in Ekiti State

In alignment with the goal of the Building Sustainable Livelihoods for Vibrant Communities (B-SLiC) project, our team conducted a 2-day training session for 5 para-veterinarians in Gbonyin and Ise-Orun local government areas of Ekiti State. This initiative aims to promote sustainable agricultural practices and foster self-reliance within the agricultural sector, ultimately improving livelihoods and enhancing community resilience.

During the training, participants received skills and knowledge essential for providing vital veterinary care to livestock distributed to project participants in the region as part of the B-SLiC project. By equipping para-veterinarians with the necessary expertise, we aim to ensure the health and well-being of livestock, thereby empowering communities to thrive.

In addition to the training, beneficiaries were provided with Para-Vet first aid boxes, disinfectants, bandages, cotton wool, multivitamins, and antibiotics. These essential resources not only enable para-veterinarians to deliver effective care but also contribute to bolstering community resilience and sustainability.



Caritas Nigeria Reinforces Capacity in Quality Improvement Initiatives

In a concerted effort to enhance the efficiency, treatment outcomes, and patient safety within the ACCESS project, Caritas Nigeria recently conducted a comprehensive capacity-building initiative for staff working in the Quality Improvement (QI) unit across Abia, Enugu, and Imo States. This initiative underscores Caritas Nigeria's commitment to delivering high-quality healthcare services and improving health outcomes for communities across the region.



The training modules encompassed a wide array of topics essential for effective QI implementation, including problem identification tools, root cause analysis tools, data transformation techniques, and QI templates for data triangulation. Moreover, emphasis was placed on embedding sustainability principles into QI efforts, ensuring lasting impact and continuous improvement in healthcare delivery.

Led by their respective state unit Leads, staff members underwent rigorous training sessions tailored to their roles and responsibilities within the QI unit. These sessions provided invaluable instruction and practical guidance, equipping staff with advanced techniques and strategies aimed at enhancing the quality of care delivery within the project's scope.

By bolstering the capacity of staff members in the QI unit, Caritas Nigeria is poised to drive meaningful change and elevate the standard of healthcare services provided to communities in Abia, Enugu, and Imo States. Through a steadfast commitment to quality improvement initiatives, Caritas Nigeria reaffirms its dedication to advancing healthcare systems and promoting the well-being of individuals and families across the region.



Health Insurance Accreditation Meeting in Imo State

In a collaborative effort aimed at expanding healthcare access and promoting social health insurance schemes, Caritas Nigeria, in partnership with Catholic Relief Services, the Imo State Health Insurance Agency, the Abia State Health Insurance Agency, and the National Health Insurance Authority convened a pivotal meeting with the heads of healthcare facilities in Imo State. The focus of this gathering was to streamline the process of health insurance accreditation across the state, ensuring that healthcare facilities are equipped to participate effectively in state-sponsored healthcare initiatives.



Through the facilitation of health insurance accreditation processes, communities stand to benefit from enhanced affordability and availability of healthcare services, ultimately leading to better health outcomes and increased resilience against medical emergencies. Throughout the meeting, stakeholders deliberated on key objectives, with a primary emphasis on onboarding healthcare facilities to the states' social health insurance schemes. Discussions centred around the importance of facilities demonstrating compliance with accreditation standards, ensuring the adequate training of healthcare staff in their respective fields, and adhering to regulatory requirements and standards.



Livelihood Empowerment in Ekiti State

With generous funding support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, we launched a transformative initiative to foster self-sufficiency and economic empowerment among communities in Ekiti State. This was achieved by distributing livestock and corresponding rearing tools to beneficiaries in Ise-Orun Local Government Area of the state on April 23.



Each beneficiary received 10 noiler chicks along with drinkers, feeders, and chicken feed. This strategic intervention not only provides tangible resources but also equips individuals with the means to generate sustainable income and improve their livelihoods. The distribution exercise aims to reach 550 beneficiaries in the state.

As the project progresses, a total of 5,500 birds are expected to be distributed, providing tangible benefits to recipients and their communities. Already, significant progress has been made, with 3,250 birds successfully distributed to 325 beneficiaries. This milestone not only highlights the project's effective implementation but also underscores its potential to catalyze positive change and uplift the lives of individuals and communities in Ekiti State.



Working towards the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT)

In the fight against pediatric HIV, we organized a training aimed at curbing the transmission of HIV from a mother to her unborn child and ramping up pediatric HIV case-finding in Imo state. The capacity-building exercise brought together a diverse range of participants, including religious leaders, healthcare professionals, community workers, and officials from the Imo State Agency for the Control of AIDS (SACA).



Focusing on the congregational approach, which recognizes the influential role of faith leaders and community structures in disseminating information, dispelling myths, and combating stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. By leveraging existing community gatherings, such as “Baby Showers”, this approach engages with communities in a culturally sensitive and familiar context, facilitating open dialogue and promoting awareness about HIV prevention and treatment.

Through this collaborative effort, Caritas Nigeria and its partners are not only strengthening the capacity of local communities to address pediatric HIV but also fostering a sense of solidarity and compassion. Empowering faith leaders, healthcare workers, and community members with knowledge and resources certainly affords every child the opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilling life, free from the burden of HIV/AIDS.



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