



# Caritas Stylus

A Caritas Nigeria Newsletter



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## EDITORIAL

We are thrilled to present a compendium of our activities in February, which was marked by our deep commitment to social justice, health, and community development. We commemorated the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking, alongside the feast of Saint Bakhita, a powerful symbol of hope and resilience. Through prayer sessions and awareness campaigns, we highlighted the plight of victims of human trafficking and reaffirmed our commitment to fighting this modern-day scourge. This event not only drew attention to the issue but also reinforced our mission to advocate for the dignity and rights of all individuals.

Our efforts to combat tuberculosis received a substantial boost with the introduction of an AI-powered mobile X-ray machine. This innovative technology is a game-changer in the early detection and treatment of tuberculosis, allowing us to reach underserved communities more effectively. Concurrently, our appointment to the Donor Coordination Committee in Enugu State marks a pivotal step in enhancing our HIV response efforts. This strategic role will enable us to streamline resources and optimize our impact in the fight against HIV/AIDS, ensuring that our interventions are both effective and sustainable.

In other significant developments, we conducted a comprehensive Baseline Assessment in the Catholic Diocese of Wukari to better understand the needs of the community and tailor our interventions accordingly. Our infrastructural support to an HIV service delivery facility in Imo State, provision of WASH services in Northeast Nigeria, and promotion of adolescent health through the Family Matters program are testaments to our multifaceted approach to community health and well-being. Additionally, the Hungarian Diplomatic Mission's courtesy visit to the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria underscored the importance of international partnerships in our humanitarian efforts.

Our Project Coordination Team Meeting and orientation exercise for new hires on our livelihoods project in Ekiti and Lagos states reflect our ongoing dedication to capacity building and operational excellence. Moreover, our staff underwent crucial training on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) in the workplace, reinforcing our commitment to maintaining a safe and respectful working environment.

As we look back on these achievements, we are inspired by the collective efforts of our team, partners, and supporters. Together, we continue to advance our mission of fostering holistic development and social justice across Nigeria.

Best wishes,

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# FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY/CEO'S DESK



Dear Friends,

I welcome you to the February edition of Caritas Stylus. Throughout the month, our team demonstrated an unwavering commitment to combating human trafficking and fostering community resilience. A standout moment was our observance of the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking, held in conjunction with the feast of Saint Bakhita. These events underscored the significance of faith and action in the fight against modern slavery. Through community engagement, we raised awareness about the need for individuals and communities to embrace the dignity and sanctity of the human person, a symbol of hope and resilience for trafficking survivors.

Another highlight of the month was the plenary assembly of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), our esteemed founding fathers. This gathering provided an invaluable platform for discussing strategic directions and reaffirming our collective commitment to strengthening the Church's salvific mission through pastoral activities, social justice, and humanitarian service. The insights and guidance from the bishops

continue to inspire and shape our mission, ensuring that we remain aligned with the broader goals of the Catholic Church in Nigeria.

In addition to these significant events, we have been actively strengthening our partnerships to enhance our impact across various initiatives. These initiatives help us to coordinate resources effectively and ensure that our interventions are both efficient and impactful. Furthermore, our collaboration with international partners, as evidenced by the Hungarian Diplomatic Mission's courtesy visit, highlights the importance of global cooperation in addressing local challenges. These partnership-strengthening efforts are pivotal in advancing our mission and achieving sustainable development outcomes for the communities we serve.

Thank you for your continued support and for being an integral part of our journey towards a more just and compassionate society.

Yours in the service of Caritas,

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



# Caritas Nigeria Gears Up for Sustainable Livelihoods Project in Ekiti and Lagos States



unveiling of a new office space specifically designated for our operations in the Badagry area of Lagos State. This dedicated workspace will serve as a central hub for project implementation and collaboration within the region.



**O**n February 1, 2024, Caritas Nigeria officially launched the B-SLiC project orientation for its staff deployed to Ekiti and Lagos States. The Building Sustainable Livelihoods for Vibrant Communities (B-SLiC) project, funded by the Conrad Hilton Foundation, aims to empower communities and foster long-term economic well-being.

The orientation program commenced with a celebration of the Holy Mass by Caritas Nigeria's Deputy Executive Secretary, Rev. Fr Peter Audu. Afterwards, Fr. Audu provided a grounding in Catholic Social Teaching to ensure that staff operate with the organization's core values in mind. Nkese Udongwo, Director of our Humanitarian Services Department, then presented the overarching mission and vision of Caritas Nigeria while the Associate Director, Friday Alhassan, offered valuable insights on how to cultivate effective partnerships. A significant highlight of the orientation was the

To achieve the best possible outcomes at the local level, Caritas Nigeria has established partnerships with various religious congregations. These include the Sisters of St. Michael the Archangel and Sisters of St. Louis, located in Ekiti State, the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul, and the Institute of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus in Lagos State. These partner congregations actively participated in the orientation program, renewed their vows, and solidified their commitment to the project's goals. This collaborative spirit fosters unity, purpose, and a shared dedication to empowering communities toward sustainable livelihoods.



# Community Collaboration Against Human Trafficking in Cross River State



Caritas Nigeria is leading efforts to combat human trafficking by fostering collaboration among various stakeholders. In Cross River State, the project team based in Ogoja recently undertook a significant advocacy visit to chiefs and clan heads of several communities including Bashua, Biajua, Ajassor, and Agbokim Waterfall from January 31 through February 1. This visit aimed to enhance protection interventions and ensure the well-being of displaced persons, focusing on their socioeconomic, psychological, and mental health needs.

This initiative was strategically designed to engage local leadership, recognizing their pivotal role in driving community development efforts. The goal was to establish a sense of ownership and partnership, ensuring that interventions align with the communities' needs and aspirations.

During the dialogue with stakeholders, pressing concerns were identified and discussed. By raising awareness among chiefs and clan heads about the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, such as refugees and displaced persons, Caritas Nigeria not only aimed at facilitating collaborative efforts that address the root causes of displacement and promote sustainable change but also reiterated the importance of inclusive development and highlight the significant impact of grassroots engagement in fostering positive change. Together, Caritas Nigeria and local stakeholders strive to create enduring impacts and advance the well-being of all individuals, especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalized.



## — Photo Gallery —




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# Commemoration of the Feast Day of St. Josephine Bakhita and International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking

On February 8, our Migration and Reintegration team based in Benin City, Edo State, conducted a market sensitization in commemoration of the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita and the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking. The campaign, which took place at Ekiadolor and Ogida markets situated in Ovia and Egor Local Government Areas of Benin City, aimed to raise awareness about Caritas Nigeria's mission and its commitment to ending human trafficking.



positive, equip themselves with knowledge, and leverage their talents to create legitimate pathways toward self-sufficiency.

In a related development, on February 8 and 13, Caritas Nigeria, in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) under the Mixed Movement Activities, conducted an anti-human trafficking sensitization session for students in Cross River State. The program targeted staff and students of Father Nicholas Memorial Secondary School in Bashua, Boki LGA and Holy Childhood Secondary School Mount Carmel in Ogoja LGA. The interactive session focused on raising awareness about the dangers, root causes, warning signs, and preventive measures associated with human trafficking.

Students actively participated in the discourse, demonstrating their developing understanding of this complex issue. Caritas Nigeria facilitators encouraged them to play a proactive role in combating human trafficking within their communities. This included urging them to report any suspected cases to the designated authorities. The sessions also equipped students with practical knowledge about common human trafficking tactics to avoid falling prey to empty promises from strangers.



Our team delved into the life of St. Josephine Bakhita, sensitizing the audience to her harrowing experiences with slavery, her profound faith, and her unwavering commitment to serving others. Her story was presented within the context of this year's theme, "Journeying in Dignity: Listen, Dream and Act". Following this introduction, the team shifted the focus to the critical issue of human trafficking. They shed light on the various forms of trafficking and antics deployed by perpetrators to lure their victims. The importance of safe migration practices and heightened vigilance were emphasized.

Caritas Nigeria urged participants to actively uphold human dignity by protecting vulnerable individuals, welcoming survivors of trafficking with open arms, and reporting suspected human trafficking activities to relevant authorities. While acknowledging the harsh economic realities that contribute to forced migration, the team offered a message of hope and empowerment. Participants were encouraged to stay



## Leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) to Combat Tuberculosis



Caritas Nigeria is leading the fight against tuberculosis (TB) in Ebonyi State through the Integrate TB project funded by the Stop TB Partnership to provide health screening services to hard-to-reach communities through an AI-powered mobile X-ray machine. This innovative technology allows us to screen individuals for tuberculosis (TB), cardiovascular diseases, and chronic respiratory conditions with ease, as part of our efforts in the early detection, treatment, and prevention of tuberculosis. Earlier in the month, our tuberculosis project team, joined by community volunteers and stakeholders, conducted successful medical outreaches in four communities in Ebonyi State, namely: Nwangagu Obeagu Item, Amagu (Ikwo LGA), Ohaozia Agba (Ishielu LGA), Mgbalukwu (Abarigwe, Izzi LGA), and Enyibichiri Alike (Iwo LGA). During the health outreach, over 400 individuals benefitted from TB and related diseases screening, with a significant 37% abnormality rate identified.



## Enugu State Government Recognizes Caritas Nigeria in Donor Coordination Committee

Caritas Nigeria's partnership with the Enugu State Government has yielded yet another significant result seen in the recent appointment of Fabian Bassey, our Team Lead for the ACCESS project in Enugu State, to the prestigious Enugu State Donor Coordination Committee. This appointment, made by His Excellency, Dr. Peter Ndubuisi Mbah, the Governor of Enugu state, highlights the exemplary contributions of Caritas Nigeria to the state's public health programs.



The Enugu State Donor Coordination Committee, comprising a diverse group of twenty members including technocrats from various fields, Commissioners, Special Advisors to the Governor, representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), and private sector stakeholders, was inaugurated on February 15, 2024. The primary mandate of the committee is to collaborate closely with the governor in facilitating communication, strategic planning, and resource mobilization to support the development of the state's health sector.

Bassey's appointment underscores the recognition of our commitment to fostering sustainable development and improving the well-being of communities in the state. Moving forward, the Committee will convene bi-monthly meetings to review its activities, track progress, and evaluate outcomes for the state's overall economic growth and development. This collaborative approach showcases the importance of strategic partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, and public health actors in driving positive change.

## The Family Matters Program Empowers Mothers in Imo State to Promote Adolescent Health

Caritas Nigeria's Family Matters Program (FMP) stands as a beacon of positive change in Imo State, thanks to its implementation of CDC-funded initiatives aimed at addressing sexual risk behaviours and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), notably HIV/AIDS, among adolescents. FMP operates with a specific focus on empowering mothers, recognizing their pivotal role in guiding their children through crucial aspects of sexual health education and behaviour management.

Aligning with the program's goals, our team conducted a visit to an FMP cohort at 24 Artillery Brigades Barracks in Obinze, Imo State, where they engaged with mothers to assess their understanding of and experiences with the program. The visit uncovered the program's effectiveness in equipping mothers with essential skills for fostering effective communication and conflict resolution and creating safe spaces for discussing sexual health topics with their children. Through FMP, mothers have gained confidence and tools to navigate often challenging conversations with their adolescents, thereby fostering a supportive environment conducive to healthy decision-making.

Feedback from participating mothers underscored the program's transformative impact, not only on their parenting approaches but also on the behavioural changes observed in their children. By empowering mothers as agents of change within their families, FMP effectively fosters a culture of open communication and prioritizes sexual health education. This grassroots approach not only addresses immediate concerns but also lays the foundation for long-term behavioural shifts and a safer, healthier environment for adolescents across Imo State. The success of the FMP in Imo State lies in its holistic approach to empowerment, recognizing the interconnectedness of familial dynamics and adolescent health outcomes. In essence, investing in mothers and equipping them with the necessary knowledge enables them to serve as champions for the well-being of adolescents.



## The Embassy of Hungary Visits the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria



A delegation from the Embassy of Hungary in Nigeria, led by Ambassador Lóránd Endreffy and Deputy Head of the Mission, Gábor Krauss, embarked on a significant visit to the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. The primary objective of this visit was to fortify and deepen the existing collaborations between the Embassy and the Secretariat. The delegation was warmly received by the esteemed Secretary-General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi, alongside other Directors of the CSN departments. Notable among them were the Executive Secretary/CEO of Caritas Nigeria and the Director of the Church and Society Department, Rev. Fr. Uchechukwu Obodoechina, PhD.

Amid the discussions, Ambassador Endreffy underscored the paramount importance of strengthening the bonds between Hungary and the administrative arm of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). He emphasized the shared values and mutual interests that serve as the foundation for fruitful cooperation. The discussions delved into various areas including education, healthcare, social welfare, and community development. The meeting provided an invaluable platform for extensive discussions on potential areas of collaboration and partnership between Hungary and the Catholic Church in Nigeria. Both parties expressed genuine optimism regarding the prospect of future joint initiatives and projects aimed at advancing common objectives.



## — Photo Gallery —



## The CBCN Holds its First 2024 Plenary

Twice every year, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) holds its plenary assembly to strengthen the operations of the Church at the arch/diocesan level. For its first plenary of 2024, the CBCN met at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria from 17 - 23 February, 2024, to dialogue and discern issues that concern the Church in Nigeria. At the opening Mass of the plenary assembly organized under the theme, “Synod on Synodality: Areas of Concern for the Church in Nigeria”, the Archbishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, commended the lay faithful for their resilience and contributions to the growth of the Church and admonished the government to implement policies that will ease the harsh socioeconomic and security challenges that affect the citizenry.

In his address, the President of the CBCN and Archbishop of Owerri, Most Rev. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji, called on the government to expedite actions towards addressing food insecurity and the heightening parlous security situation of the nation. He also reiterated the commitment of the Conference to promoting the Church’s values in Nigeria and leading the faithful in the right direction. The opening ceremony of the CBCN plenary, which was held on 18 February, 2024, brought together national and state leaders and industry experts, including the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His



Excellency, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who was represented by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Senator George Akume, and other dignitaries.



## Caritas Nigeria Conducts a Baseline Assessment in Wukari Diocese

In a bid to strengthen the capacity of dioceses, Caritas Nigeria, with funding support from Catholic Relief Services (CRS), carried out a baseline assessment for the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) of Wukari Diocese, Taraba State. This initiative is part of our institutional capacity-strengthening efforts aimed at empowering diocesan Caritas agencies – the JDPC – to effectively execute emergency and development interventions. The assessment process entailed a comprehensive evaluation of the diocese's current capacity. By meticulously examining various facets of its operations, we pinpointed specific challenges hindering the efficient implementation of development initiatives. This method enabled us to tailor solutions that are precisely suited to the identified needs, thus maximizing the impact of interventions within the Wukari Diocese.



As part of the assessment, particular attention was given to the diocese's education sector. To this end, our team visited Bishop Patrick Sheehan Memorial College in Wukari to assess the educational landscape within the diocese. This on-the-ground examination helped our team to understand the challenges and opportunities present, enabling us to devise targeted strategies to enhance educational outcomes and contribute to overall development efforts effectively.



## Boosting Healthcare Infrastructure: Caritas Nigeria Provides Power Generator to IMSUTH, Orlu



As part of our health systems strengthening initiatives, Caritas Nigeria, with funding support from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), procured and presented a brand-new power generator to Imo State University Teaching Hospital (IMSUTH) in Orlu on 20 February, 2024.

The intervention was undertaken to address power outages and disruptions in medical procedures and patient care at the facility, with which we partner on the Accelerated Control of HIV Epidemic and Sustainability Solutions (ACCESS) project to deliver accessible HIV treatment, care, and support services to the target populations.



Receiving the energy machine on behalf of the service delivery facility, the Deputy Director of IMSUTH's Nursing Services, Ngozi Uwakwe, acknowledged our consistent support and commitment to HIV epidemic control in the region. She added that the intervention would enhance working conditions in the facility and ultimately benefit the communities they serve.

## Building a Safe Workplace: Combating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Caritas Nigeria's firm stance against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) within its organization exemplifies a proactive and ethical approach to safeguarding the well-being of its employees and stakeholders. By recognizing the necessity for a multi-faceted strategy, we demonstrate a commitment to addressing SEA comprehensively. To this end, our team organized a sensitization session with the staff of our Imo State office on 21 February, 2024.



The awareness-raising session underscored our dedication to empowering its staff with the necessary knowledge to identify and combat various forms of SEA. The workers were not only equipped with the knowledge to protect themselves but were also encouraged to remain vigilant and report any potential incidents they encountered. This proactive approach not only mitigates risks but also creates a culture of accountability and responsibility among staff members.

This initiative aligns with our values of respect, transparency, and accountability. By fostering a zero-tolerance culture towards SEA, our organization sends a clear message that such behaviour is unacceptable thus, upholding ethical standards that reflect positively on Caritas Nigeria's reputation.



## Caritas Nigeria Offers Essential WASH Services to Vulnerable Communities in Northeast Nigeria



In a significant effort to improve the lives of people in Northeast Nigeria, Caritas Nigeria is playing a key role in delivering vital Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services to vulnerable populations. The project, known as the Comprehensive Humanitarian, Emergency Response and Economic Recovery for Sustainable Livelihoods in Nigeria (CHEERS-Flex), is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through Caritas Norway and implemented by Caritas Nigeria and the JDPC of Maiduguri Diocese. The intervention promotes better hygiene practices in households and helps prevent disease transmission.



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To achieve this goal, our teams visited 8 communities spread across 4 LGAs in Adamawa and Borno States to conduct household latrine disinfection. The benefitting communities included Kaigamari, Custom, and Alajiri in Gwoza within Bama LGA of Borno State; Gada Uku and Tsukuma in Michika LGA of Adamawa State; and Tsitsil and Gra Kopa in Madagali LGA of Adamawa State. These communities often face challenges in accessing clean water and proper sanitation facilities. To address this, Caritas Nigeria implemented household latrine disinfection across all eight communities.



Similarly, our team educated young schoolgirls of the U.B.E Junior Secondary School in Alajiri community, Bama LGA of Borno State on the self-production of reusable dignity kits, an endeavour to promote hygiene among adolescents in Northeast Nigeria, especially in challenging environments where access to sanitary products may be limited. Additionally, recognizing the vulnerability of adolescents, particularly young girls, to various forms of exploitation and violence, our team conducted an awareness session on the prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) at Shehu Kyari Junior Secondary School in Bama LGA. During this session, students were educated about the different types of SEA and GBV and empowered with the knowledge to identify and report such cases.

To facilitate the reporting of SEA and GBV cases, we established reporting and feedback mechanisms to ensure that victims receive the necessary support and perpetrators are held accountable. In a proactive measure to enhance safety, particularly during darker hours, the students were also provided with solar lanterns. The lanterns serve as a practical protection measure against sexual abuse and exploitation, illuminating dark corners and deterring potential perpetrators. By addressing both the immediate hygiene needs of adolescents through dignity kits and raising awareness about SEA and GBV while providing tangible safety measures, Caritas Nigeria underscores its commitment to the holistic well-being and protection of vulnerable populations in Northeast Nigeria.

Recognizing the importance of education alongside infrastructure improvements, the CHEERS-Flex project provides hygiene awareness in the project locations. In Damara (Pulka) community, Borno State, we leveraged the support of the project donor to conduct a vital sensitization session on proper handwashing techniques using running water and soap. Empowering community members with this knowledge helped them to take charge of their hygiene and reduce the risk of illness, particularly among children.



## Review of the Accelerated Control of HIV Epidemic and Sustainability Solutions (ACCESS) Project

On 28 February, our ACCESS project staff working in our country office in Abuja held a meeting to assess the priorities of the project. Convened by the project leadership, the focus of the gathering was on identifying areas for enhancement and devising strategies to meet targets for the current quarter (Quarter 2) of the project across our project implementation states of Abia, Enugu, and Imo.



The meeting had in attendance the technical support teams from the project states and had state-specific presentations. These presentations provided insights into the progress and challenges encountered in our HIV program interventions since the onset of Quarter 2 in the Financial Year 2024. Key discussions centred on reinforcing initiatives related to HIV testing, comprehensive antiretroviral therapy (ART), adherence counselling, as well as care and support services. Additionally, attention was given to addressing the needs of OVC in the communities we serve.



## Aligning Strategies from Caritas Nigeria's Project Coordination Team Meeting

Our Project Coordination Team (PCT) held an Operations Meeting in our country office on February 28 to align strategies across all our programs and projects. The PCT, established by Caritas Nigeria's Senior Management Team, serves to cultivate and fortify a cohesive organizational culture in programming, which encompasses various strategies, approaches, templates, systems, and structures.

The Operations Meeting provided a collaborative platform for decision-making and discussions on strategies for organizational operations, fostering a sense of unity among different units and departments to advance our mission. Alongside updates on our current programs and projects, presentations were delivered by several units. These included the Administrative Services Department, which provided updates on logistical matters and internal processes; the Finance Unit, which highlighted beneficial financial planning strategies; and the Internal Audit Unit, which shared insights into internal controls, compliance measures, and strategies for enhancing transparency and accountability.



Furthermore, the Communications Unit briefed the PCT members on corporate communications and brand promotion strategies, emphasizing the importance of staff involvement in elevating Caritas Nigeria's visibility through active engagement with the organization's social media platforms. In his closing remarks, our Deputy Executive Secretary, Rev. Fr. Peter Audu, expressed gratitude to all attendees for their valuable contributions and reiterated management's dedication to providing overarching guidance and facilitating cross-learning opportunities across projects.



## — Photo Gallery —



## Partnering with the Enugu State Ministry of Health to Promote Health Awareness



On February 28, our field office in Enugu State partnered with the Enugu State Ministry of Health to conduct a medical outreach for the Batch A, Stream 1 of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members at the Orientation Camp in Awgu, Enugu State. Addressing the Corps members during the outreach, Dr. Rosemary Odo, the Tuberculosis Program Manager for the State Ministry of Health, provided comprehensive information about tuberculosis (TB), including its causes, symptoms, modes of transmission, and available treatment services. Emphasizing the importance of early detection and treatment, Dr. Odo underscored the role of the Corps members as advocates of positive change in referring suspected TB cases to treatment facilities.

Caritas Nigeria's TB intervention team complemented the sensitization session by encouraging the Corps members to actively participate in advocating for positive health behaviours within their communities. Following the educational session, TB screening and HIV testing services were provided to the Corps members, along with general body wellness counselling. The medical outreach not only aimed to raise awareness about TB and HIV but also served as an opportunity to promote overall health and wellness among the campers and some staff of the NYSC Scheme. Through such collaborative efforts, Caritas Nigeria continues to play a pivotal role in enhancing health awareness and promoting positive health outcomes in communities across the state.



# Laudato si'



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