



VEINNET
VULNERABLE EMPOWERMENT
INITIATIVE NETWORK



FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH



WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

FOOD-FOR-HEALTH INITIATIVE

Widespread malnutrition in Nigeria:

A NEW VISION IS URGENT; A NEW UNION TOO

- I. **Health for All through Food for Health** is a new initiative to address our concern about malnutrition which is both critical and widespread in Nigeria and the entire Africa, with heavy implication to general health, particularly maternal and child mortality.
- II. UNICEF report on “Mother, New Born and Child Health and Mortality in Nigeria revealed a despicable fact: Every 10 minutes, one woman dies on account of pregnancy or childbirth in Nigeria. This means about 800 women die in every 100,000 live birth; Nigeria's neo-natal mortality stands at 528 per day –one of the highest in the world; about 1 million of the 5.3 million children born yearly in Nigeria die before the age of five; Nigeria has a high record of Africa's pre-school children with stunted growth. Although the Northern Nigeria was said to be worse hit, recent report shows a spread to the southern side (see map).
- III. Also, a new global report said Nigeria accounts for 11 million of the 60 million children with stunted growth globally due to malnutrition. It predicted additional 2.4 million stunted Nigerian children by 2020, if appropriate measures are not taken. Although the report says about 9 out of 10 of newborn deaths are preventable, experts say unless an extraordinary effort is made by us all, things would be worse by 2020.
- IV. The consequences of malnutrition for human wellbeing and socio-economic development are massive. Malnutrition seats most health challenges and exacerbate those present, severely undermining most development efforts. WHO says malnutrition is an impediment to the progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goals 1 (Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), 2 (Achieve universal primary education), 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women), 4 (Reduce child mortality), 5 (Improve maternal health) and 6 (Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases). These **reasons point to why prevention and eradication of malnutrition should take precedence over all other development programs.**
- V. Nationwide, malnutrition challenges the transformation agenda of the present administration. Nigeria's high maternal and child mortality is a global embarrassment. ***This situation, to us, is truly inexplicable, unjustifiable and grossly unacceptable.***
- VI. Unfortunately, while malnutrition is mostly a food deficiency challenge, almost all arsenals for intervention are from the health sector; which is a secondary and an intervention sector and only a recipient of the failings of the primary sectors. Most action plans miss out on ***food/ nutrition, home and mother who are first defense for the child.***
- VII. About 60% of the population, particularly, the rural dwellers are not benefiting from present health package due to limiting factors, namely affordability, acceptability, accessibility and availability. We believe part, if not all, of these handicaps might still bedevil the otherwise well thought out UN- led -intervention - the **Life Saving Commodities**, which incidentally are all drugs.
- VIII. In the face of daunting health challenges, the structure is running as usual. Conventional wisdom suggests **you cannot continue to do things the same way and expect a different result.** Attaining the goal of Health for all is feasible so long as it is ***not business as usual.*** It calls for a ***paradigm shift;*** one that recognizes that agriculture, the **provocateur of the life chain**, through nutrition and safe food (which we dared to call **nature's health insurance**) has the primary mandate for health, and that health is a complementary, secondary and intervention sector.

ONE DAY FORUM ON FOOD FOR HEALTH WAS SPONSORED BY WHO WITH NIGERIA'S FMH AS TECHNICAL PARTNER HELD ON THE 12TH OF MARCH 2013, AT SHERATON HOTEL, ABUJA.

on the theme:

Food for Health: Promoting Food as A Life Saving Commodity Towards Saving One Million Lives. Part of the findings revealed that:

- I. Malnutrition is not just a challenge on its own, it seats almost all health problems and exacerbate those present and affect all aspects of development;
- II. Most development effort / program are hampered due to malnutrition as we need to first address the wellbeing of the individual through prevention and/or eradication of malnutrition;
- III. There is need for official / legal recognition of food as the foundation of all actions on health and as a lifesaving commodity. It has the advantage of emphasis on prevention, then curative and all-inclusiveness.
 - a) Food-For-Health innovation comes with complex, extensive, yet comprehensive sub-projects to ensure ease / ready adoption and all-inclusiveness with positive implication to the realization of other Health initiatives such as the Saving One million Lives, the MDGs and also to facilitate the attainment of sustainable nutrition security and Health for all Nigerian in the shortest time possible.

According to IFPRI report, a major problem with Africa is that there is no institution that has real authority in nutrition, responsible for nutrition and accountable for nutrition management. However, this extensive **innovation** which is more for nutrition management for prevention of malnutrition at the grass root would require new program and strategies to prevent and eradicate already existing cases.

In the state of affairs that is compelling for allotting a high priority to the health of the vulnerable, particularly mother and child, extensive success will be made by adopting the Food-For-Health innovation and Food as a Life Saving commodity. Nigerian nay African need to brew a new development program to accelerate Africa's development and food is the platform.

This new vision is it. It is very urgent too.