

# UNFPA IN NIGERIA

Quarterly Newsletter

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Dear Partners,

As the demographic dividend gains momentum, it is crucial to remember that harnessing the potential of young people and investing in them is at the centre of it all. Investment in their reproductive health and wellbeing; education; skills development; governance and social inclusion will determine how well they make it as leaders of tomorrow.

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, has a mandate to ensure that every young person's potential is fulfilled. Realizing this starts with advocating for the rights of girls to equal access to education and reproductive health care services, protecting them from harmful socio-cultural practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation, giving them access to contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS and finally when she is ready to deliver, childbirth is safe. It starts with girls because they are the most vulnerable but our work is not hinged on them alone.

In this fifth edition of "UNFPA in Nigeria" you will learn more and read about how the Fund is making a difference in the lives of women, girls and young people.

We will love to hear from you. Please send your comments or inquiries to [rep.nigeria@unfpa.org](mailto:rep.nigeria@unfpa.org) or call 0905-377-9641. You can also reach out to us on twitter: @UNFPANigeria, Facebook: /NigeriaUNFPA or read more of our stories on [nigeria.unfpa.org](http://nigeria.unfpa.org).

Cordially,

Eugene Kongnyuy  
Deputy Representative/Officer-in-charge



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# FISTULA SURVIVORS GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE



The UNFPA Regional Director of West and Central Africa, Mbingue Ngom (2nd left) with Kano State Government partners gives out start-up kit to a fistula survivor

Hafsatu Yunusa, a 34 year old fistula survivor was diagnosed with Vesico Vaginal fistula deemed irreparable. She had 6 failed attempts and lived with the condition for 20 years. "I got married at age 14 and was in labour for 3 days" she said. Hafsatu, was too young to be pregnant and with no skilled birth attendant, was more susceptible to pregnancy related complications.

Vesico Vaginal fistula, commonly known as Obstetric fistula is a hole between the vagina and rectum or bladder that is caused by prolonged obstructed labor leaving a woman incontinent of urine or feces or both. It is a long term consequence of early marriage, where a child that is too young to wed gets pregnant and is physically unable to deliver a baby naturally. Without access to emergency obstetric care or a caesarian section, she and the baby may die; if they survive, she has experienced so much internal pelvic damage that she leaks urine or feces, or both continuously, without any control.

Survivors of fistula, are often neglected by their family and friends and confined to an involuntary life of solitary. "I spent a long time suffering from the ailment" says Hafsatu, "I remember how lonely I was, I did not participate in feasts or visit relatives, and when my first surgery failed, then the 2nd, the 3rd, the 4th ... I thought I was condemned to spend the rest of my life in shame but thank God I was wrong".



Hafsatu Yunusa, Fistula survivor and graduate of the UNFPA skills acquisition programme



Products made by graduates of the UNFPA fistula skills acquisition programme



Products made by graduates of the UNFPA fistula skills acquisition programme



Start-up kits given to graduates of the UNFPA fistula skills acquisition Programme



Start-up kits given to graduates of the UNFPA fistula skills acquisition Programme

With one in four rural Northern Nigerian girl married off before her eighteenth birthday, obstetric fistula is a condition predominantly found in Northern Nigeria. Every year, there are about 120, 000 new cases that occur. Preventable and treatable, it is a condition no one should have to endure.

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, together with partners is leading a global campaign to end fistula within a generation. The Fund works to strengthen health care systems and improve access to reproductive health care services including family planning. In addition, with support from the United Nations Federal Credit Union, UNFPA provides Fistula reconstruction surgeries to survivors and empowers them with vocational skills and start up kits so they can be economically vibrant and begin the process of re-integration into the community.

Hafatu, is one of the fistula cases treated, a graduate of the livelihood skills acquisition programme and a beneficiary of a start-up kit to support her new business. She is now reunited with her husband and community.

"I thank God that I can now sit with people and socialize. I have acquired a means of livelihood and I have equipment needed to kick start my business. Thank you for taking people like me out of poverty and misery" she said.

Nigeria has the highest absolute number of fistula cases worldwide. "We remain committed to work with the Federal Government of Nigeria and other countries where this condition is prevalent, to remove the contributors to obstetric fistula - Child marriage, early pregnancy, Lack of education and limited access to health care – until fistula becomes history", said Mabingue Ngom, UNFPA Regional Director of West and Central Africa.



## GIVING AFRICAN YOUTHS A VOICE ON IMPLEMENTING THE AU ROADMAP AND HARNESSING AFRICA'S DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

Leaders of Africa have reached a consensus, that the inclusive economic growth and sustainable development of the continent is dependent on its youthful population and in the ability of Africa to cease the window of opportunity to harness its demographic dividend. The convening of a two-day youth conference in Dakar, from 22 – 23 March, 2017, by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund for West and Central Africa, gave Africa's youth a platform to engage in high-level advocacy and policy dialogue on issues that affect them, in line with the African Union Road Map on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through investments in youth.

"Young people are clamouring to be at the table of dialogue and their mantra is 'nothing for us without us' and rightfully so", said Mr. Mabingue Ngom, the UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa, "It is important to put young people first, listen to their views and allow them to be part of the process, because any programme developed for them, without them cannot be a success".

Adolescents and youths are 1.8 billion strong and form a quarter of the World's population. In Africa, they make up 60 per cent of the total population, 37 per cent of the working class population while accounting for 60 per cent of all African unemployed people in Africa (AFDB, 2013), with a dependency ratio of about 80 per cent.

In West and Central Africa where the needs are greatest - 37 per cent of boys and 31 per cent of girls are enrolled in secondary school and 4 in 10 girls will be married off before their 18th birthdays. These challenges combined with the limited access to reproductive health services and information of adolescents, the high prevalence of teenage pregnancies and the continued of harmful socio-cultural practices like female genital mutilation and child marriage are catalysts to extreme poverty, forced migration, radicalization and violent extremism on the continent today. "To change this

story, collective actions are needed now, says Ms. Fatouata Bintou Massaly, a young advocate of the African Youth and Adolescent Network on Population & Development (AfriYAN) "we cannot fulfill our potential without the investment in the youth, it should no longer be a lip service but a key priority for the countries in Africa".

From the 2017 African Union Road Map to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, discussions around harnessing Africa's demographic dividend gains momentum and UNFPA continues its role in leading the path of demographic dividend by strengthening the capacities of young leaders and youth networks to engage effectively in high-level advocacy, so they are central to the decision and policy making mechanisms needed to successfully harness Africa's development. UNFPA recognizes the critical importance of bringing young people into decision-making processes and project planning, and will systematically continue to call for Putting Young People First.



Elizabeth WILLIAMS  
NIGERIA  
Youth Participatory Platform



## NIGERIAN ACTRESS STEPHANIE LINUS NAMED UNFPA REGIONAL AMBASSADOR FOR WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Today, 8 March, 2017, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, appointed Nigerian actress and activist, Stephanie Linus as the UNFPA Regional Ambassador for West and Central Africa.

A Member of the Order of the Federal Republic (MFR) of Nigeria, a national award bestowed on outstanding citizens by the President of Nigeria, Mrs. Linus is an award-winning actress and activist, who is passionate about women's rights and health. She is the executive producer of the movie – "DRY", that tells a true-life story of a 10-year-old girl who was a child bride and who died early due to pregnancy-related complications, specifically fistula. Through her foundation, "Extended Hands", Mrs. Linus has done extensive work in the field of fistula, which earned her the Miriam Makeba Award for Excellence in 2007, and the Beyond the Tears Humanitarian Award.

"It is my aspiration that access to reproductive health care for women and girls, especially family planning, will be seen not as a blessing to be wished for, but as a human right to be fought for," said Ms. Linus. "Fought for, not just because of equality, but because we are tired of women dying while giving birth, tired of teenage girls dropping out of school because they got pregnant too early, tired of women not having a choice to decide if, when and how many children they wish to have. I know I am tired of this. This is why I feel honoured to partner with UNFPA and to use my network to make these issues widely known."

Africa has the highest maternal death burden in the world. For example, although West and Central Africa accounts for 6 per cent of the world population, it contributes to 40 per cent of the world maternal deaths.





*“For UNFPA, improving the health and status of women and girls remains a priority, and we will continue to accelerate efforts, by building strategic partnerships to scale-up successful interventions that put young people first” said Mabingue Ngom, the Regional Director of West and Central Africa. “*

Our ultimate aim is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled”. As Regional Ambassador, Mrs. Linus will help advocate and raise awareness on these issues, whilst encouraging policies and laws that protect the rights and dignity of the girl child, and the critical investments needed for young people to fulfil their potential and for Africa to reap its demographic dividend.





## IT IS VITAL TO PROTECT THE SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CRISES SITUATIONS AND BEYOND SAYS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UNFPA

*UNFPA remains committed to the full realization of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all women and girls in all conditions, crises or otherwise and at all times”*

**Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin,**  
Executive Director of UNFPA,  
the United Nations Population Fund.

He said this during a joint visit to Northern Nigeria with H.E Senator Aisha Jummai Alhassan, the Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development and Mr. Mabingue Ngom, the UNFPA Regional Director of West and Central Africa.

Statistically, about one Nigerian woman dies every 10 minutes from pregnancy related conditions. Deaths that could be prevented if women and girls have access to education and reproductive health services, including family planning. The risk of death is heightened in humanitarian crises that displace populations and undermine community social support mechanisms, limiting access to health facilities and workers to take care of women's and girls' special needs.

In Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, the three most affected states by the insurgency crisis, it is estimated that 53 per cent of internally displaced persons are women and girls, of whom about 1.73 million are of childbearing age, with 276, 000 pregnancies expected in 2017. The reproductive health of these women and girls need to be protected urgently.

*"Our aim is to redouble efforts to ensure that their rights to access health care is protected and the Government have all the support they need to overcome overwhelming challenges"*  
- Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin

**This joint mission is expected to strengthen and leverage strategic partnerships to ensure that UNFPA support creates critical synergies with the programmes of the Nigerian Government, in order to create a nation and world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.**



## KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MISSION

### MEETING SURVIVORS OF THE BOKO HARAM CRISIS

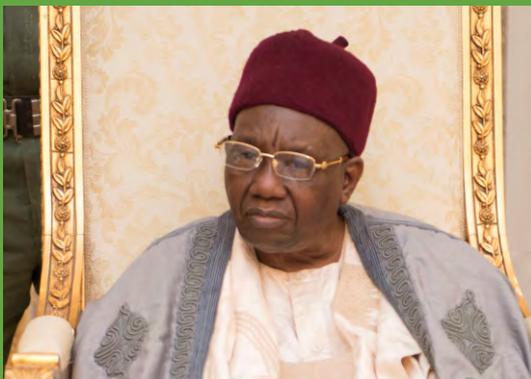
UNFPA supports health facilities in the crisis affected States of the North East to provide sexual and reproductive health services to survivors of insurgency, especially women and girls. Often times, access to these lifesaving services, especially for pregnant women and lactating mothers, is a determinant to whether they live or die when faced with life-threatening childbirth complications during crisis



|| During his mission, the Executive Director, inspected the UNFPA Maternity ward clinic in Dalori camp, where pregnant women receive antenatal and postnatal care services. He also visited the delivery ward where he interacted with a survivor and her new born baby.

### ADVOCACY TO IMPROVE THE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CRISIS

*His Highness Abubakar Ibn Umar Garbai El-Kanemi, the Shehu of Borno, reiterated his commitment to use his position to protect women and girls from gender-based violence.*



*Borno State Governor, H.E Kashim Shettima, for his part, thanked UNFPA for its humanitarian assistance and committed to protecting the rights of women and girls and their access to educations and reproductive health care*



## ADVOCACY TO END EARLY MARRIAGE AND END THE SCOURGE OF FISTULA

North West Nigeria has the highest indices of child marriage with the median age at marriage pegged at 15.4 years. Socio-cultural norms driving this practice include, limited girl-child education and religion. During his mission to Kano State, the Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin advocated for girl child education as a strategy to delay child marriage and solicited the support of His Highness Muhammad Sanusi II, the Sarkin Kano and the Executive Governor, H.E Abdullahi Umar Ganduje.

*“Every day, we hear that our people take their adolescent daughters and give them out for marriage. Such a girl gets no proper care, when she wants to deliver; she ends up with fistula. They are everywhere in the region. We as leaders have a burden entrusted on us. I call on all political, religious and traditional leaders to allow our girls to be educated*

Muhammad Sanusi II, the Sarkin Kano



## MOVING THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND FORWARD IN KADUNA STATE

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin met with H.E the Governor of Kaduna State Mallam Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai, to discuss access to family planning, health system strengthening and the demographic dividend. Together, they unveiled a technical brief on harnessing the demographic dividend in Kaduna State.

*“Kaduna has a youthful population with about 80 per cent below the age of 35 years. The decision to ignore or harness their potential will determine if the population will be a liability or an asset. By this unveiling, we have initiated steps to do the latter*

-H.E Mallam Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai  
Governor of Kaduna State



WORLD POPULATION DAY 2016 NIGERIA  
THE TEEN GIRLS SPEAK  
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Delivering a world where  
every pregnancy is wanted,  
every childbirth is safe  
and every young person's  
potential is fulfilled.